



Ken Rayner:

What if one of the best career opportunities in Ontario isn't sitting behind a desk, but instead building, maintaining, repairing, operating, and powering the province we call home? Today, we're talking about apprenticeships, skilled trades, and the future of work in Ontario.

Announcer:

It's time for the *IHSA Safety Podcast*.

Ken Rayner:

Welcome to the *IHSA Safety Podcast*. I'm your host, Ken Rayner. On today's episode, I am very pleased to welcome Candice White, CEO and Registrar for Skilled Trades Ontario. Welcome to the podcast, Candice.

Candice White:

Good morning, Ken. Thank you so much for having me. It's a pleasure to be here.

Ken Rayner:

I'm really excited about this podcast, and I'll tell you why. I am going to be asking you questions as the host, but I am also going to be asking you questions as a parent of a fourth-year university mechanical engineering student who, once he finishes his degree, is looking at the possibility of the skilled trades as a career, and particularly perhaps as a millwright. I'm going to be asking you these questions, one on behalf of IHSA, but also on behalf of my wife and I and our son so that we can get some more clarity and understanding about opportunities for young Ontarians and new Ontarians in the skilled trades. So if you're good, let's get into it.

Candice White:

So excited.

Ken Rayner:

Okay, Candice. So first one I have for you is, as I understand, Ontario is facing a significant demand for skilled trade workers, yet many people still don't fully understand the opportunities available through apprenticeship. So what's the biggest thing you wish Ontarians knew about the skilled trades today?

Candice White:

Great question, Ken, and I do receive that question often, and it's one of my biggest and most exciting narratives to put forward, and that is that skilled trades is a first choice career. It is not a fallback. It's not the third pathway behind a university career or a college career. It is one of three pathways. It is a legitimate career. It is one that can provide a stable income. You earn while you learn, as they say, in regards to less debt load, you're learning with your hands. There's a lot of practical outcomes. You can build relationships. You're working with people from all generations and all walks of life. What better classroom to be in on a daily basis, almost from day one. And there is so much value in that, because sometimes I think our strongest muscle in our body is becoming our thumbs as we're going through.

So definitely taking a step back from that and getting out into the field, whether it's service sector, motive power, construction, it doesn't really matter. The foundation is the same. It's practical on-the-job learning, building relationships with a stable income from day one.

Ken Rayner:

Absolutely. Very enticing. So maybe we can get into, if for someone, considering a career in the skilled trades, let's take a look at what apprenticeship journey would look like from the day when they start to when they achieve certification.

Candice White:

Sure. It's a multi-year path for sure. Number one priority is getting exposure to the trades. No different than picking any other career. What trade are you most interested in? And so I highly recommend the first step actually being when you're in public school or high school and taking advantage of all the exposure that's out there, whether that's attending a Level Up career fair, whether that is participating in a pre-apprenticeship program or the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program, better known as OYAP, to get that exposure and see what trade is the best fit for you. Once you've made that choice, next step is getting a sponsor, which is an employer or a sponsor that will register you as an apprentice through Skilled Trades Ontario. Once you have that registered training agreement, you get to work, you get on-the-job training, and then there is a cadence of in-class training requirements.

Depending on the trade, depends on the number of in-class training hours that are required, but the province has over a hundred training delivery agents that offer apprenticeship programs. So once you've achieved, you've chosen your trade, you sign your RTA, you get on-the-job training, you do your in-class training components, and then once you have the magic number of on-the-job training hours and in-class training under your belt, you then complete your apprenticeship through your portal account with us. And then if the trade has a certificate of qualification exam at the end, a CFQ exam often referred to, you write your exam. If it does not have an exam at the end, you'll be issued a Certificate of Apprenticeship, which is called a C of A, and then "Bob's your uncle," and you're done, and you're well on your way as a licensed journey person.

Ken Rayner:

There you go. There's A to Z in terms of the journey from the beginning to the end. So fantastic. Thank you for laying all that out. Candice, wanted to ask you maybe about a success story. IHSA has a program

that we work particularly with a lot of indigenous communities in Ontario, and it's called the Line Crew Ground Support Program. Through the time we've put that on, there has been some just wonderful success stories about young Ontarians who have found a career, have established themselves through this program, gotten really gainful employment. I can only imagine how many success stories that you have in terms of different apprentices and how it's changed their career. So could you share a success story with us today?

Candice White:

Oh, it's almost difficult to choose, Ken, to be honest. It's one of my favorite parts of my job is traveling around the province and speaking to youth who are considering a trade or folks that are in the middle of their apprenticeship or even journey persons that have an incredible story of where they've come from, what they went through, and where they've landed based on the apprenticeship system. There's a couple that come to mind. One was a young carpenter that I was exposed to in Thunder Bay, and he was struggling in regards to not knowing what his next steps were, maybe just making some life choices that he maybe shouldn't be making. And he was exposed to the Level Up career fair and he's seen there was over 50 different trades that were put on display for him and he chose carpentry and then he set to work and this young man pounded the pavement.

He knocked on doors, "Please sponsor me. I am willing to strap on the tool belt. I'm willing to put in the hard work. I just need you to give me a chance." And knocked on the right door at the right time and got that yes. And he is just getting ready very soon to enter into another level of schooling and he's another couple years out from completion, but essentially he is well on his way and he feels he has purpose. He's providing back to the jobs that he's working on. He loves the team he's working with. His employer took a chance and you know what? That's going to change his life. It has changed his life. He said, "My mom always tells me my eyes are now brighter because of this decision." And she sees the purpose on his face and just being able to talk to him.

And there was a single mom in Morrisburg. She was looking at becoming a heavy equipment operator and she was struggling and again, someone took a chance. And so she is now working towards becoming a certified operating engineer and success is right around the corner for her.

A hundred of those stories, Ken, we see it all the time where there is light for these folks that they're seeing where they may be struggling. Oak Hills Revitalization is an amazing program who takes folks who are coming out of incarceration and gives them a chance at a career path. And so there's lots of these programs out there and I'm so grateful that they exist.

Ken Rayner:

I am too. And as impactful and as beneficial it is to those young people that are looking for a career, I will say selfishly, I think it's also for people like yourself and those of us at IHSA, it also is wonderful for us to be able to provide that guidance, provide a little bit of help to get them along in their careers. It is so fulfilling and rewarding for us as well. Wouldn't you agree?

Candice White:

1,000 per cent agree. We are so fortunate as a province to have such dedicated people in our ecosystem, whether that's OYAP recruiters, guidance counselors, folks that are in non-for-profit organizations, education system, and even our own staff. We have just recently in the last eight months stood up regional offices across the province. We put boots back on the ground for this exact purpose. We need folks out there looking face-to-face with our youth and advocating for apprenticeship. It is key. They need to understand it and you can't learn everything by calling "1-800-government." You just can't. And so we're back out, boots on the ground, and we're making those connections every single day.

Ken Rayner:

Excellent. Okay, so let's maybe move into some things that could potentially cause some confusion. So Ontarians may hear terms like compulsory trade, certification, licensing, but they're not always clear on what they mean and if there's a difference between any of those terms. So, why should Ontarians, workers, employers really care about those particular distinctions?

Candice White:

Well, they're very, very important to get the distinction. There is materials and information out there, but we can guide to our website. We have toolkits that we just launched out there that clearly lay all of this out, but I can give you a summary in regards to our listeners exactly the difference between them. A compulsory trade is essentially a trade that you cannot legally work in that trade without being a registered apprentice or a licensed journeyperson. You need to have a credential from Skilled Trades Ontario in order to work in that trade. Licensing and certification goes back to the difference between a certificate of apprenticeship versus a certificate of qualification. They're both certificates. A certificate of apprenticeship means you're in a trade and you completed an apprenticeship where there's no exam at the end. And so you were issued your certificate of apprenticeship, but it's not considered a license.

So, you've completed a program, but the licensing comes into play when you've wrote your certifying exam, you've wrote the C of Q, and that is the license that you carry around, you get a wallet card. But essentially that is the difference. You hear the word voluntary a lot, or non-compulsory. They're the same thing. Non-compulsory and voluntary trades are the same. And essentially the core difference there is that you can work in that trade without having some sort of status or credential from Skilled Trades Ontario. And there is more non-compulsory trades than there are compulsory trades. Essentially, it's a great podcast to talk about a lot of the compulsory trades. If you take a look at the list of the 23 of them, they are definitely more towards high-risk health and safety concerns to themselves or the public. You can see the difference in there, but there's more that goes into those decisions than just health and safety, but it is a big component.

The safety of the public, safety to the employee, safety to those around them is paramount and very important when determining what's going to be a compulsory versus a non-compulsory trade. Skilled Trades Ontario doesn't make those decisions, but there is a lot of thought and criteria that goes into determining what bucket of trade's going to fall in.

Ken Rayner:

Candice, great answer. Thank you very much. Again, I had my parent hat on and my host hat on, and I was listening through. My left ear is my parent ear and my right ear is going to be my host ear, but I was listening through both and I appreciate that answer because I learned something.

Candice White:

And you're definitely listening then with both of them. But my son is a journeyperson, so he's a licensed 309A electrician, and I've been exactly where you are. He went down the apprenticeship road before I was in this chair, and so we learned a lot through parenting, and I've learned a lot of where the gaps are by living on that side of the table and helping my child navigate through the system and what's working and what needs to change. There wasn't a better classroom for me than actually helping navigate the system and maybe some changes that need to be made now that I have the ability to do so. But there's lots of questions, but there's so many resources out there that people just don't know is available. There's so many resources, and it seems like Minister Piccini, when I landed, and he's a huge advocate for skilled trades, and when I landed in the role, he was like, "Candice, the apprenticeship pathway looks like the Tokyo subway map. It looks convoluted and confusing. We need to fix that. It needs to be something that folks can look at and be like, okay, to get from here to here, this is what I need to do." So completely agree, and we undertook that and we definitely have streamlined what the roadmap looks like and what folks need to do. We've put up toolkits and we've ramped up our social media, and probably the most successful thing we ever did was buy ads in Minecraft.

Ken Rayner:

Oh, wow.

Candice White:

Literally, we bought ads in Minecraft promoting skill trades, put ads out on Snapchat, and it broke our website on a Tuesday afternoon. 600,000 hits come in. I didn't realize Minecraft was such a big thing, parents playing with their children, but it was massive. And so there's so much more interest in the skill trades, for sure.

Ken Rayner:

Fantastic. Well, just by coincidence, yesterday I was on a jobsite in Barrie, Ontario, and I was working alongside two young Ontarians in their 20s that had just in the past six months become certified electricians and had gone through the apprenticeship program. I got to tell you, boy, were they proud. When I was asking them about their journey and how they've got to where they are today, it was with a significant amount of pride that they certainly shared with me everything they had done to get to where they are and how happy they are now to be able to be doing this work and seeing themselves in a career for many, many years to come with a very big need in terms of projects and things like that that'll be in their future. So yeah, it's definitely happening today. People are very happy to have been gone through the process, and so I'm hoping that, as you are, that for anybody listening to this podcast that is

considering a potential career in the skilled trades, that this is something hopefully that'll pique their interest even further and have them take that next step to do some more investigation.

So why don't we look a little bit, Candice, about maybe some misconceptions, because I'm sure there's a lot of them out there because again, that there's so much information and there is a bit of complexity. I know you talked about the Tokyo subway map. There's complexity to this, so there's got to be misconceptions. So what is the biggest misconception that you think employers have about hiring and training apprentices in Ontario?

Candice White:

What I hear from employers, and I don't always love speaking on their behalf, but what I have heard from them is a couple of things. One is we train them and they leave. They don't stay, and so they're in a constant training model within their business. Then the other is more around generational communication gaps. Thirdly, is any financial implications of having an apprentice. When it comes to generational gap, obviously we know that there's a lot of retirements coming up in our skilled trades sector, and unfortunately there's not a lot in that middle career. I mean, they exist, they're there, but we have a huge number that are getting ready to retirement. We know how many are registering. We're planning on registering about 22, 23,000 new apprentices this year. So we know that's the pipeline coming in. So there is a generational communication and knowledge transfer gap that we're trying to address, cost of having an apprentice, but there has been significant amount of work done on ROI, returns on investments of having an apprentice there.

And it is clear that there is more value in having an apprentice and more value, even if you have them and you lose them, that what you have done for the ecosystem, for the economy, for that particular trade, for the industry, there's so much pride in what a business owner or an employer or a sponsor, what they build into talent, into their team, and to be able to harness that talent, harness that pride, and even if they move on to the next employer, you have done such a great thing and you'll now be able to take on the next apprentice and build that foundation for them. So that's why we put out the Sponsor Toolkit, and I'm going on STO on the Road, which is going to launch here in September. STO is going on the road. We're going to go out and we're going to talk to employers and we're going to talk to sponsors and really push that message and really hear from them the brass tax of it.

What's the reluctance? For some, it's economy driven. We can't be naive to the impacts of tariffs and all the things that we all have an abundance of awareness of. And so now it's more them planning for the next steps because we're not going to be in the position that we're in forever. Nothing lasts forever. This is a preparation time for me, that's how I view it, for the next onslaught of demand. And so really encouraging folks to take this pause time, take this time to prepare and to bring folks on and to build that talent in because I fully believe, and this is Candice White's opinion, is that it's going to come, the demand's going to come, this economy is going to just blow up and we have to be ready for it. The government is making significant, conscious, purposeful decisions and investments to ensure that that happens and we can't turn a blind eye to that. We have to be ready.

Ken Rayner:

Perfect. I've heard you mention a couple of times a toolkit. So maybe we could get into Candice. How does Skill Trades Ontario support the apprentices and the employers who train them? So what are the

things like these toolkits that you can maybe expand on further and making sure too that we can include these, so whatever Candice is speaking about and the resources from Skill Trades Ontario, we'll make sure we include them as a link on the podcast channel. So Candice, what are some of those supports?

Candice White:

Yeah, definitely. I love talking about the toolkits and all the supports that we have available, and we're continuing to build out our library of resources on a regular basis. I highly, highly recommend if you are considering skilled trades, if you're involved in skill trades in any capacity, please join us on all of our socials. Everything goes out there, whether it's toolkit resources, QR codes, answers to questions, frequently asked questions, answered, anything that's changing. So don't just come to us when you need us, come to us all the time, make us a part of your friend group and check in what's going on. So we're very active. So LinkedIn, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, we're in all the places. But outside of that, the toolkits were purposefully put together to be the roadmap and the guiding document, one's for apprentice, one's for sponsor. It answers all of the frequently asked questions.

It guides you to the financial incentives. Ontario has a very robust program that I think is underprescribed and people are not aware of it as much. There is financial resources out there for employers, for apprentices to assist them, whether that's through the in-class portion, whether that's assisting with day-to-day life expenses while you're attending school, whether it's milestone driven, et cetera. So all of those resources and QR codes are in the toolkit. They're also available on our social media and our website and our boots on the ground folks. And then STO's going on the road. So it's going to be about a 25-location tour, and we'll be at the Level Up! career fair, which sees about 60,000 students and parents and educators over the course of the fall. So huge, huge amount of impact that happens there. So come out, come talk to us. We host, along with our ministry friends, a parent night, and it has exploded.

Last year, I can't quote the exact percentage increase, but it was in the hundreds. I know one location was an 800 per cent increase from the year before of parents coming out at the night session. So their child goes to the day session with the school, they see the Level Up! Career Fair, they go home, tell mom and dad, and then they come back that evening and we talk to the parents. We answer the questions. Even the parents try the trades because they're all interactive booths, so you're able to try the trade themselves. So there is a ton of opportunity to engage with us, and I just hope that folks take us up on it.

Ken Rayner:

Amazing. And I'm so glad. I mean, we went through some trials and tribulations between 2020, 2023 where in-person events just weren't being put on, people weren't coming out to them, and I'm so glad they're back because yes, you can read a website. Yes, you can read material, but if you really want to get insight, go speak to somebody, go speak to somebody in the know, have a conversation with them, look them in the eye, ask those questions. I'm so glad you're doing that, Candice, and I'm sure that the parents and those young Ontarians that are considering the skilled trades will just really appreciate it as well. Candice, I'm going to ask you a question here where I think I could play the part of Candice White and answer this question, because when I think about myself, while I wasn't an apprentice, I was at one point a young worker, and I definitely had mentors in the workplace and I had, when I think back, employer engagement that made an impact on my career.

So I can only guess how important that is in a successful apprenticeship outcome. So could you speak to that a bit? How does mentorship and employer engagement really help to create a successful outcome for apprentices?

Candice White:

Yes. Apprenticeship is built on mentorship, essentially. That is the model. Because the majority of an apprenticeship is spent on the job, training with a licensed journeyperson who is transferring that knowledge, strong mentorship can make the difference between someone finishing the program and someone exiting the trade, essentially. It is a vital piece of the apprenticeship system, and also it's a huge piece of on-the-job safety. It's a critical component of it. Mentorship is ensuring that good safe work habits are transferred over, good strong work ethic is transferred over, that generational knowledge of what they've learned in the trade is passed over. I mean, essentially, our role is to entice folks, break the stigma, entice folks to come in and handle the paperwork, provide opportunity. But really when it boils down to it, the heavy lifting is done by the mentors that they are the ones that make an apprentice successful, essentially.

And I know my son had three strong mentors throughout his apprenticeship, and he talked to one yesterday on the phone. It was a conversation we had last night was about he had talked to one of his sponsors who taught him, he's in a bit of a niche in the electrical world, and those relationships sometimes last long beyond the apprenticeship, whether you stayed employed there or not. And I think folks need to remember and understand that and embrace it and value it. It is so, so important.

Ken Rayner:

Fantastic. Candice, what do you see as the biggest challenge facing Ontario's apprenticeship system today, and what do you believe needs to happen to address it?

Candice White:

Courage. I think courage needs to happen to address it. I think there has been so many great things done and so much movement in regards to—skilled trades are not fighting for conversation and attention anymore. As a career pathway it's definitely on the forefront of everyone's minds, whether that's policymakers or parents or youth educators, but we need courage to ensure that we are putting policy in place and making the changes to be as nimble and flexible as we can be while not losing the integrity of the apprenticeship and the skills and the education that we need our journeypersons and our skilled labour force to have. That said, we can't be archaic. We can't say because we've done it this way for decades and we could probably justify in some ways that it's still working, but we can also equally justify that it's not. And so when I'm chatting with my team in regard and challenging them, we need courage.

We need to make changes to the system so that folks are finding it, whether it's entry point, whether it's access, whether it's examination, whether it's curriculum development, all of those pieces need to be looked at with a 2026 lens, not a 2006 lens. And I think, I don't want to age myself, but to me, 2000 doesn't seem that long ago, but essentially it's 25 years ago, that's a life sentence, 25 years. And so we need courage. Outside of that, some great work is being done across the country as we're uniting on all fronts with labour mobility. We now have the minister's office and our government has passed As of

Right legislation, so it's definitely easier to come to work in Ontario as a licensed journey person and really pushing the mobility piece across the country. If you're licensed in Alberta, you can come and work in Ontario without having to go through a ton of red tape to be able to do that.

That mobility piece and that approach to being united and that unity is also breaking down barriers. So essentially it's courage and mobility, and then having the resources to implement what our courageous thoughts have brought to us essentially, which I also don't feel is a big fight right now. It's just ensuring we're putting the right resources in the right places and that there's strategy behind it.

Ken Rayner:

Excellent. And I can appreciate that need to be courageous if, as you stated, look, you are doing your best as the leader of Skill Trades Ontario to prepare our province for what you believe is next to come, which is a great demand for these workers and you want to make sure that we're ready to supply that demand. So I appreciate that very much. I also appreciate you going back to 2000 and saying it is 25 years ago. When I listened to '70s and '80s music I think it's 40 or 50 years ago. Ooh, does it make me feel old. So I'm right with you, Candice. I hear you.

Candice White:

I know, I know. And the TV shows nowadays, anyway.

Ken Rayner:

We could do a separate podcast on that.

Candice White:

Totally, totally. In some cases it's still better though.

Ken Rayner:

Oh, the music is for sure, at least from my perspective.

Candice White:

For sure. Our decades were way better.

Ken Rayner:

Yes, from our perspective, for sure.

Okay. So my wife and I have lots of neighbours and friends who have children who are in high school, and I get a sense that they're going to have conversations as the children creep up towards grade 12 as to, all right, you've got choices. You've got university as a path, you have college as a path, or you potentially have a career in Ontario skilled trades as a path. What would you say to a parent and to their child who's trying to decide between all of these options?

Candice White:

Exposure, and it can't just be grade driven.

From a personal perspective, as a parent perspective, my son's report card will say didn't maybe resonate with taking a skilled trades career pathway. Definitely was being more guided towards a college or university pathway, but he didn't see himself in that career. And so I think it's breaking down those biases, ensuring your child has exposure to everything. Your child is not less accomplished because they are a, well, millwright, if your son goes down that path or an electrician like my son did. Essentially, they will be able to have a wonderful lifestyle. They will be able to provide for their families. And so what is their passion? What is their natural talent? What is their skill set driving them to? And break down those preconceived notions in regards to what we think we want them to be and maybe what their grades are saying they should be, and just being open to all of the options and ensuring that they have the exposure to all of the options.

And that's why the level up career fairs are so important because it gives that exposure that they maybe are missing in other components of their life if they don't have a family person or a family friend or someone who is in the trades where they can get that direct exposure. But the lifestyle that a skilled trades can provide is equally and sometimes better than any other career path because you don't have—It's different financial commitment when you go into it, but it still has to be the right fit. It has to be the right fit. And because folks coming into the trades, it may not be for them and off they go and they go into college. But if someone's in university and they're like, "I really just want to work with my hands or I want to build something or I want to create something," they have this yearning to do that.

We should be able to, as policy makers, educators, parents, whatever it may be, to ensure that they have the opportunity to take that on and not feel guilt about it and actually be proud about it. My youngest daughter graduated university and she was a special high skills major and was on the dean's list and off to university she was going. When she crossed the stage at her high school, it was pretty impressive, the list of things and the cheers and the applause. When my son went across the stage, it was, "Well, he has chosen to go into the trades." And it was, I would say lackluster at best, but as a parent equally as proud of the moment and equally as proud. And I can tell you she's not further ahead than him. So it's just keeping an open mind I think and educating yourself, educating your child, picking the best pathway for them. Shout it from the rooftops when your child succeeds regardless of what that's in.

Ken Rayner:

Yep. Love that. And Candice, do you remember the board game Life? Do you remember that at all?

Candice White:

Yes. We still play that at our house.

Ken Rayner:

Do you still play it? It's been a few years since we played it, but just when you were talking about updating things and making revisions, I was thinking that the makers of that game may want to change because like I said, it's been a while since I played it, but if I can remember correctly, you at the beginning have two paths you can take. You can continue in post-education or you can go into the

trades. And at one point, if I remember in the game, the trade player gets farther ahead earlier, but then the university player eventually catches up and surpasses them. And I think the makers of the game may have to change that because from what I'm seeing, it's possible that those that go to university may never catch somebody who goes into the skilled trades. So maybe you and I can write a letter to the makers of the game life and ask them to contact Skilled Trades Ontario and have them update the game.

Candice White:

Such a great observation. You are so right. And we have that conversation at home when we play the game. Normally they're laughing at each other for how many kids they have to fit in the car and who got strapped with three sets of twins. But you're so right. We had that conversation around where we geek out around board games as often as we can. And that is definitely a conversation we have had. And I have three kids in three pathways, college, trades, and university, and they all have a different story to tell and the board game definitely should catch up. I think we should send that email. Joint email. We need to lobby.

Ken Rayner:

Yep. We'll start lobbying. I like it. Well, or maybe the Skilled Trades Ontario has to come up with their own version of the Life board game.

Candice White:

You're onto something.

Ken Rayner:

There you go.

Candice, as technology, equipment and work practices continue to evolve, how does Skilled Trades Ontario ensure apprenticeship training and curriculum remain relevant to the work performed in Ontario workplaces today and into the future? I mean, that's a big question. And who is involved in this process besides those that you have at Skilled Trades Ontario?

Candice White:

Industry is heavily involved. It's an ongoing conversation. Obviously having 144 trades, we are responsible for ensuring. Now the Red Seal trades are dealt with nationally and we are one voice across the country, and so it's a different process. But when it comes to the provincial trades and a little bit of the Red Seal trades as well, industry's heavily involved. So there's what we call Industry Advisory Committees. They're IACs. You can register to be a member of them on our website. And I can tell you that sometimes we struggle. We really love to have folks that are on the tools or in the field or working within that trade every day to see what are they being exposed to? What are they seeing? We can't determine it on our own sitting in an office. We are not all journeypersons here at Skill Trades Ontario. We definitely have journeypersons on staff, but fundamentally they're working for Skill Trades Ontario.

They're not in the field. They're not working with the most current and up-to-date technology that's there if they're sitting in an office at Skill Trades Ontario. So we make a conscious effort. I would like to see a bigger uptick from industry in regards to sitting on those committees, but really wanting folks that are on the tools, so to speak, on the committees. We send out when curriculum is going to see a big change, we do a validation survey and it goes out to as many people as we could possibly find. We promote it as much as we can because again, an industry advisory committee is a sample of industry, but not everything's the same. We're basically a lot of provinces in one, geographically. What's happening in the north is very different than what's happening in the west in this province. And it's one curriculum, it's one training standard. So trying to find that golden thread, that line of best fit of what is going to provide value and get an efficient and successful skillset at the end. And so highly recommend taking a look at where. We have 77 products in development right now, so we are heavily in it.

When I took the reins, there was a significant backlog in the updating of the curriculum. So it's been a heavy, heavy focus for us right now. It's a heavy focus at the Red Seal table, but if I can promote anything it's that anyone who's listening, the C of Q exam is not written on the curriculum. It's written on the log book, which is the training standard. So when you're studying, if you're struggling, it's the biggest message I can get out there. Please don't say, "Well, I didn't learn it at school or I haven't seen it on the job, so why is it on the exam?" It's on the exam because it's in the training standard. And so when it's in the training standard in the log book, the log book says you should have exposure to it. So sit down with your employer, go through it and ensure you've had exposure or you have gained some experience or knowledge of every component of that trade.

Because once we license you, you're able to technically, regardless of who your employer is or how you move around, you're technically licensed to do that work. So very, very important to make that difference because the training standard is where we start and it's a log book and the curriculum is built from that and the CFQ exam is built from that. So multiple products get developed for each trade, but highly recommend industry keep communicating with us, keep talking to us. It's very difficult to stay on top of 144 trades. I recently just put 18 trades under review because there's no training delivery agents and no registered apprentices in them. So I don't want to put a ton of resources and there hasn't been a registered apprentice for decades in some of them. And so this is back to having the courage to let's put resources where we need to.

But essentially it is heavily industry driven with Skill Trades Ontario guidance along the way, obviously, and best practices when it comes to writing curriculum and setting standards. And we obviously have committees across the country and we talk to our friends in the other provinces on a regular basis. Yeah, so that's very industry driven.

Ken Rayner:

Yep. Fantastic. I appreciate that answer very much. Okay, so I've got two questions left for you, Candice, and they're both, what's the one thing? So I'm going to really put you on the spot here in terms of the most important in both aspects. So if a parent such as myself, a student, an employer listening to this podcast right now, what's the one thing that you'd want each of them to understand about the opportunities available in Ontario skilled trades?

Candice White:

To the parent, skilled trades are a first choice career, not a last choice career. They're in demand, they're well paid, and they're built to last. To the student, you don't need certainty, you need curiosity, and that's your first step. And there are many low-risk ways to get exposure to a trade before you commit to a career path. Whenever I go out and speak to the youth, my biggest thing, you just need to be curious. You don't need to be certain.

Ken Rayner:

I love it. So follow the logic or the wisdom of Ted Lasso in terms of be curious, not judgmental when you're looking at things like the trades, going with an open mind. Amazing. And my last question, again, it's a change one thing, so here we go. If Candice White, and I'm not saying you don't have the power to do this by the way, you might have the power and I don't even know it, but if you could change one thing about how Ontario thinks about the skilled trades, what would it be?

Candice White:

I have a little bit of power. I don't have a magic wand though, but essentially it is really going back to the stigma conversation. Stigma and courage really boils down to ensuring that our youth have exposure to the skilled trades, ensuring that they have the ability to experience something outside of the general subjects that we know that all youth need to be exposed to, the maths, the sciences, the histories, the geographies that are all exceptionally important, but are very academia focused. And so ensuring that we are pointing our youth to all of the options that are available and being proud of all of the options that are available and all of these successes because we need a skilled labour force. And labour is not defined as only skilled trades. Labour is defined as work and effort put into an activity with an outcome. So whether that labour is a doctor, a lawyer, a nurse, or an electrician, a plumber, a sheet metal worker, it is all skilled labour and our economy needs it, our future needs it for stability for generations to come. It cannot be ignored. We need to ensure that we break down that stigma and not relive and regurgitate decades of "blue collar versus white collar" and where a career path falls within it because it ultimately is irrelevant, because as long as someone, if you go to work every day and you are proud, that is the ultimate goal, right? You go there, you have learned a skillset, you have achieved something, and you go to work every day and put that skillset to use to be able to provide for yourself or for if you choose a family, and then you have a point of pride. And then essentially that automatically spills over and equals happiness and success. And we need to redefine as a society, as parents, as policymakers, the definition of success. And ultimately, if I had a magic wand, it wouldn't take us another three decades, Ken, to figure that out.

But in fairness, every day, every conversation I have when I'm out and about, when I'm speaking to people, when I'm speaking to parents and I'm at events, the momentum is shifting. We feel it. We feel the momentum shifting. We see everyone just being open and curious about this pathway, the skilled trades and what can it provide? And I'm equally as supportive of any child, any parent that college or university is the right career path. Absolutely, we should be equally as open for skilled trades to be a career path. And if there was a magic wand to do that, I would gladly wave it, dating us again back to our TV conversations, genie in a bottle, wiggle my nose, and it would just happen. But I don't know if I have that much power, but willing to roll up the sleeves and work hard towards it for sure.

Ken Rayner:

Amazing. And everything you stated, I agree with you a hundred percent. I think there's momentum changing. As I mentioned earlier, I was on site yesterday with some electricians, including the master electrician who was overseeing the work, and we were shooting some video of the work that they were doing. And one of the questions we asked was, "What's your favourite part of your job?" And Chris, who is the master electrician, shout out to Brian's Little Electric in Barrie, BLE. We said the one thing that is his favorite part of the job is finishing a project and then down the road driving by that project and going, "I contributed to that. I was a part of that."

And you're talking about feeling fulfilling and feeling satisfied in what it is you do. Boy, it's hard to top that. It's a hard one to beat, right? It is. I think there's phenomenal opportunities for young Ontarians to go into the skilled trades. And touching on something else that we mentioned earlier, as you go into it, make sure that you're making decisions where they're educated decisions and that you've really researched into all of the options. So be curious, be curious and look into this with an open mind because Ontario needs you for the future. And if this is a great avenue for you, boy, it can be a very fulfilling career. So Candice, thank you so much. I really appreciate both as the host of *the IHSA Safety Podcast* and as a parent for the information you share today. And I know it's going to help a lot of others as they go through their decision-making process in terms of what life and what career is right for them.

And I really appreciate everything you shared today. Thank you so much for being here.

Candice White:

Thank you, Ken. It's a highlight of my day, for sure.

Ken Rayner:

All right. And thank you very much to all the listeners for listening to our episode on Skilled Trades Ontario with Candice White. Be sure to subscribe and like us on your podcast channel and visit us at ihsa.ca for a wealth of health and safety resources and information.

Announcer:

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