

summer 2026

HVAC

TACTICAL

JACKIE SORENSEN

**EARNING A SEAT
AT THE TABLE**

Ask a Jerk #7

PROFILE: **LESLYE MEDINA**
more than the hvac mom

EUGENE SILBERSTEIN: CAREER TIPS





Congratulations!!

Welcome to the **summer 2026** episode of HVAC Tactical Magazine.

A voice of the people.

When we rolled out the very first issue of the magazine, we had a vision to bring the voice of the trenches and the movement to the mainstream.

A magazine for the trenches, by the trenches.

Our goal is simple.

- Provide valuable, relevant content that our fellow tradesmen and tradeswomen in the trenches can appreciate.
- Build awareness of the movement happening on social media and highlight individuals making an impact in the HVACR community.

Content

If you or someone you know has great content that you'd like to see published in the magazine, feel free to reach out. We're always open to chat!

Email us at magazine@hvactactical.com

Digital Extras

Logos, QR codes, and highlighted interactions throughout the magazine connect to videos, product pages, social media profiles, and additional resources.

If you're reading digitally, tap the links. If you're holding the print copy, scan the QR codes.

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Thank you for your support and welcome to the movement!

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Some choice words of wisdom for
the next generation of hvac techs

summer 2026

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Ben Poole HVAC Tactical Founder

Ben Poole is an entrepreneur and 3rd Generation HVAC professional. He founded HVAC Tactical in 2018, the HVAC Tactical Awards in 2020 and the HVAC Tactical Magazine in 2023.

His goal is to simply elevate the industry, reignite the passion for the trade and motivate others to take on the personal responsibility of mastering their craft.



Matthew Pryce Editor-In-Chief

Matthew Pryce is a published author, professional musician, innovative digital marketing maven, and rabbit & traditional husband.

His work has appeared in the Sports Illustrated, The National Review, the NY Daily News, various HVAC publications, and of course, the **HVAC Tactical** magazine.

He is the vice-chair of the HARDI marketing council, and the Head of Marketing Communications for Centrotherm Eco Systems, a plastics manufacturer located in New York, and his second solo album **No Words** just dropped on all the steaming platforms in May 2025.



Rebekah Poole Advertising & Production Manager

Rebekah brings a strong foundation in sales, training, and process development from her years in the automotive industry. Known for her sharp eye and organized follow-through, she moves projects forward and smooths out the rough edges—whether in copy or production.

Raised in a family of contractors, Rebekah feels right at home in the trades. At HVAC Tactical, she connects sponsors and advertisers with opportunities to support the trades, spotlight technicians, and grow brand visibility that resonates.





Ask A Jerk #7

Why do you go to work every day? I think most of us would say “because I need the money” or “because my wife makes me”, or “when I don’t go to work the shiny fish in my head tells me to do bad things, then those people come and put me in that place again. I don’t like it there.” Uhhh, yeah, whatever.

But really, if you do have a job and go there almost every day, why wouldn’t you try to do good work and get the most out of it? I mean, if you’re going there anyway, be good at it, right? I see techs all the time that don’t take advantage of all of the spiffs and commissions and referral fees that they could get with just a littttle bit more effort. Imagine, just a little bit more effort, maybe an extra question on each service call, like “Hey dude, I could install a UV light in your duct work, and that might help get rid of that dead possum smell in here. Do ya want one?”

That one question could help you make enough money this month to get you that silver-plated, flashing LED-lit, six-person bong you’ve had your eye. Rad!

**Dear HVAC Jerks,
What do you think about Ductboard.
I hear different things about it being dangerous. I don’t install it, but I do see it once in a while; should I recommend replacing it?**

- Ductboy Joe

What’s up, Ductboy?!!

Ok, so this debate has been going on for a while now, and I do have some experience working with it in one of my past lives. The issue with Ductboard in general (and there are different grades and coatings) is the possibility of the fibers being released into the airstream.

When installed properly, this isn’t really a concern according to the many tests that have been done, however, this assumes that there is no damage to the duct, and that it was cut properly. Another minor

concern with older Ductboard (10 to 15 years or more) is that much of it was coated with Formaldehyde, and some off gassing is possible.

Now, I'm not an expert, but I believe that the product is generally safe, but if it's more than 10 years old, or in rough shape, I would at least consider replacing it. Personally, I just replaced my 20+year old fiberglass duct system with metal and 3 layers of R4 bubble wrap.

Hey Jerks,

I need some help getting my small business to grow. I started my own business about five years ago, and it is growing, but there is so much to do, I know that I'm not making as much money as I should be. I feel like I'm reinventing the wheel with everything I do. I don't know if I'm buying right, or spending the right amount on my benefits, or anything like that. Is there one place I can go that can help?

- Lost in business

Dear Lost,

This is such a common problem. A guy (yes, or a girl) starts a business expecting to make a fortune and spend all his weekends (yes, yes, or her!) on their (ya happy?) four wheelers, eating at fancy restaurants, and shopping for yachts. Well surprise, it's more complicated than that.

Unless you are going to be a one-man (don't) show, (and who wants to do that), maybe you're going to spend a lot more time in the office and managing things than you thought. Which is fine, you just need to know how to do it.

There are lots of books, podcasts, courses, and consultants out there to help, but you have to decide to do it. Try starting with the Service Business Mastery podcast with Tersh and Josh. You'll learn a lot there and hear about other resources. Good luck!

Dear Ugly bastards,

I'm a 30-year-old female in the business for more than ten years, and proud of it. I love listening to you guys, especially Kevin's deep gravelly voice; so sexy! I was wondering if he would consider letting me take him to dinner and discussing his views on service techs selling in the home. I think I could change his mind or at least have fun trying. Does he have any problem kneeling? Waiting for a response,

- Jenny in charge

Dear Ms Jenny-in-charge,

Wow!

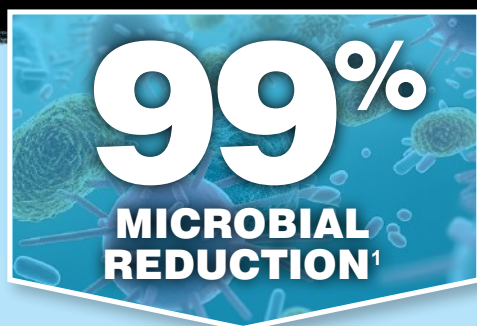
You sound like you're in charge of things, and I think your boy K would be very happy to have you change his mind. You know, he can be a bit stubborn with some things, so you may have to impose a little friendly persuasion on his ass, but I think you

should give it a try. And while you're at it, I've got a list of things he needs to fix as well; I'll forward it to you.



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1. The Lancet. *Effect of ultraviolet germicidal lights installed in office ventilation systems on workers' health and well-being: double-blind crossover trial.* Vol. 362, No. 9398.
2. Y. Wang, et al. *Effectiveness of an ultraviolet germicidal irradiation system in enhancing cooling coil energy performance in a hot and humid climate.* *Energy and Buildings.* Volume 130, pages 321-329; 2019 ASHRAE Handbook—HVAC Applications. Chapter 62: Ultraviolet Air and Surface Treatment.



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Earning a seat at the table

Jackie Sorensen
didn't inherit
her place at the table.

She bought it,
and **not** under
ideal circumstances.



by dan vastyan







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In an industry built on legacy, grit, and generational knowledge, it's not unusual to meet someone carrying on the family business. What's less common is meeting someone who had to fight—strategically, financially, and emotionally—to keep that legacy alive.

Jackie Sorensen didn't inherit her place at the table. She bought it, and not under ideal circumstances.

Today, Sorensen stands at the helm of Thorson Heating, a third-generation HVAC company with roots dating back to 1943. She's also the force behind a bold personal brand, Jackie HVACie, and a growing voice for women in the trades. But what makes her story compelling isn't just that she's a woman in a male-dominated industry. It's that her path forward required navigating the messy, often unspoken reality of family business succession.

Growing up in the trade

Sorensen didn't dream of growing up to be an HVAC tech. Like many second- and third-generation HVAC kids, the trade was simply part of the background noise of her childhood.

Her grandfather and great uncle founded the company after returning from World War II. By the time Jackie came along, the business was firmly established and under her father's control, but her early exposure was more observational than hands-on.

"I spent more time in the shop than in the field," she said. "It wasn't until after high school, when I started working summers, that I really got out on service calls with him."

For Sorensen, that hands-on experience flipped a switch. She started in service and install, learning the trade from the ground up. Jackie eventually faced a decision familiar to many aspiring technicians: pursue a traditional apprenticeship or fast-track her education.

"I could either spend five years apprenticing or two years in school and come out with an associate's

degree in HVACR," she said. "I chose the faster route and enrolled in Southeast Technical College."

That decision accelerated her entry into the field, but it didn't make the road ahead any easier.

When succession isn't simple

By 2020, Sorensen was effectively running the company. She was growing it, modernizing operations, and proving she had the ability to lead. There was only one major problem: she didn't own the company.

That disconnect created a tension that many family businesses face but few openly discuss. The person driving growth isn't always the person holding equity. Over time, that imbalance becomes unsustainable.

"I kept telling my dad I wanted ownership," Sorensen said. "Whether the acquisition was phased in or I bought it outright, I needed a path forward that ended in ownership. Dad would agree, commit... and then get cold feet."

This cycle repeated itself for years. Meanwhile, life was evolving. Jackie had married Zane Sorensen, who she'd met in tech school, and he started working for Thorson Heating. With both of them working under her father's ownership, the stakes got higher. When she became pregnant, Jackie struggled to get maternity leave from her father.

"It started to feel like our earning potential and quality of life were always going to be at my father's discretion," she said. "That's a tough place to be, even though he had the best intentions."

So, Jackie did something bold. She built a solid business plan to start her own company. Then she brought it to her father with a clear message: sell me the company, or I'll become your competition. And she meant it.

Hostile takeover

Sorensen half-jokingly refers to what happened next as a “hostile takeover.” But beneath that humor is a reality that was anything but easy.

Her father needed to sell, but he refused to retire. At the same time, the financial realities didn’t neatly align.

“The purchase price that made sense for me wasn’t enough for him to fully retire,” she explained. “It was a double-edged sword.”

Sorensen was committed to doing right by her father and ensuring he had financial security, but she also couldn’t overpay and jeopardize her family’s future.

“I paid full market price,” she said. “It’s like having to fight for a seat at the table even though your family owns the table.”

The deal took about a year to finalize. Her father remained on payroll longer





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than traditional SBA financing would allow. That meant Sorensen had to get creative with funding, securing private financing to make the deal work. Ironically, due to his health, her father only remained on for about another 18 months.

Sorensen officially took full control in 2023, and eventually her father retired completely. At that point, it had become less of a choice and more of a necessity.

Building something sustainable

Today, Thorson Heating is a five-person operation focused on residential and light commercial service and replacement, with a gradual return to commercial work.

At one point, the company was the largest non-union shop in South Dakota. At another time, it was a one-man operation under her father. Sorensen is now shaping the next chapter.

"My dad was a service tech through and through," she said. "He didn't have the knowledge or desire to manage people and grow the company. That's where I'm different."

Jackie's vision isn't built around aggressive expansion for its own sake. Instead, it's rooted in sustainability—both for the business and her family.

"I'd love to see us at 12 to 15 people so I can spend less of my time in the field and more on management and growth," she said. "The sky is really the limit. If things are running smoothly, there's no reason it couldn't grow beyond that. But it's not about hitting a specific number. It's about quality of life."

That perspective reflects a broader shift happening across the industry.

For many younger owners, success isn't just measured in revenue. It's measured in flexibility, fulfillment, and long-term stability.

Sorensen is also thinking generationally. Her son is five years old.

"That gives me about 20 years before I have to ask if he has an interest in the company," she said. "If there's one thing I've learned, it's that succession should never be assumed."

The future of HVAC: opportunity & complexity

Looking ahead to the coming decades, Sorensen sees both promise and challenges as an HVAC contractor. On the positive side, access to information has transformed the technician experience.

"My dad used to joke that we have it easy now," she said. "We can call for help or look something up instantly. He used to beg the homeowner to use their phone to call back to the shop for help if he couldn't figure a problem out."

The availability of information is only going to continue increasing."

Jackie also believes that the customer experience is evolving and improving. We now have better scheduling tools, better system design and sales software, and communication platforms that streamline customer-contractor interactions.

Technology cuts both ways

"Equipment is getting so computerized," she said. "It's moving further away from being repairable."

Where technicians once oiled motors or repaired control boards, today's systems often require full component replacement. That shift increases costs for contractors and homeowners alike and adds layers of complexity to service work. Regulation is another factor.

"As efficiency standards go up, so do equipment costs," she said. "Permits are getting more

expensive too, and in some areas, they're tied to the value of the project, which can even impact property taxes."

Looking ahead, Sorensen expects technologies like remote monitoring—currently common in commercial applications—to become standard in residential systems.

"New technology typically appears first in commercial equipment and trickles down," she said. "Not every homeowner is eager to embrace



connected technology. Some people love it. Others are wary because of security concerns or simple digital illiteracy.”

Advice for families navigating succession

Having lived through a challenging ownership transition, Sorensen has clear advice for others in similar situations.

“Start the conversation early, and be honest and candid,” Jackie said. “Have the hard conversations. Know each other’s intentions. It’s not fun but putting it off only makes it worse.”

She also emphasizes the importance of flexibility. For parents, be proactive and open to different structures, including phased ownership transfers.

For children, understand that outside opinions can be helpful, but no one knows the family dynamic better than you do.

Enter Jackie HVACie

While navigating uncertainty around ownership, Sorensen made another strategic move. As an investment in herself, she started building the Jackie HVACie personal brand.

“I wanted to create something recognizable, something that was mine,” she said. “I wanted it to be fun, edgy and hard to ignore.”

Jackie posts frequently to Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram. Her pickup truck is wrapped in leopard print, and her messaging is edgy.

One billboard read:

“You’re hot, call me.”

Another tagline: “We’ll fix what your husband can’t.”

One of her Instagram videos, which detailed a customer refusing to pay because she was a woman, reached 1.3 million views.

“The comments were wild,” she said. “Having your own personal brand makes people remember you. It’s helped me connect with people across the industry and in my local community.”

Jackie believes all technicians should consider a personal brand. Blending personal identity with professional life resonates with people in and outside of the industry.

Giving back

If Jackie HVACie is the bold, outward-facing side of Sorensen’s work, the “Hot Momma” giveaway is its heart.

Each year for Mother’s Day, Thorson Heating gives away a fully installed furnace and air conditioning system to a woman in need.

The local Sioux Falls community nominates candidates—consistently more than 100—and a third-party group of women selects the recipient.

“We delegated the selection process to some women in the community,” Sorensen said. “That task can be really emotional when you begin to see how much need there is.”

The stories range from financial hardship and health crises to families living without heat. For Sorensen, the initiative is deeply personal.

It played a key role in her return to work after maternity leave, giving her a project that connected her to the community in a meaningful way.

Jackie Sorensen’s story isn’t just about being a woman in HVAC. It’s about ownership, in every sense of the word.

Ownership of a company. Ownership of a personal brand. Ownership of a path that wasn’t handed to her, but built through persistence, tough conversations, and calculated risk.

#





George Narvaez

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years in the trade

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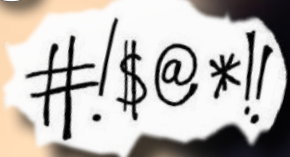
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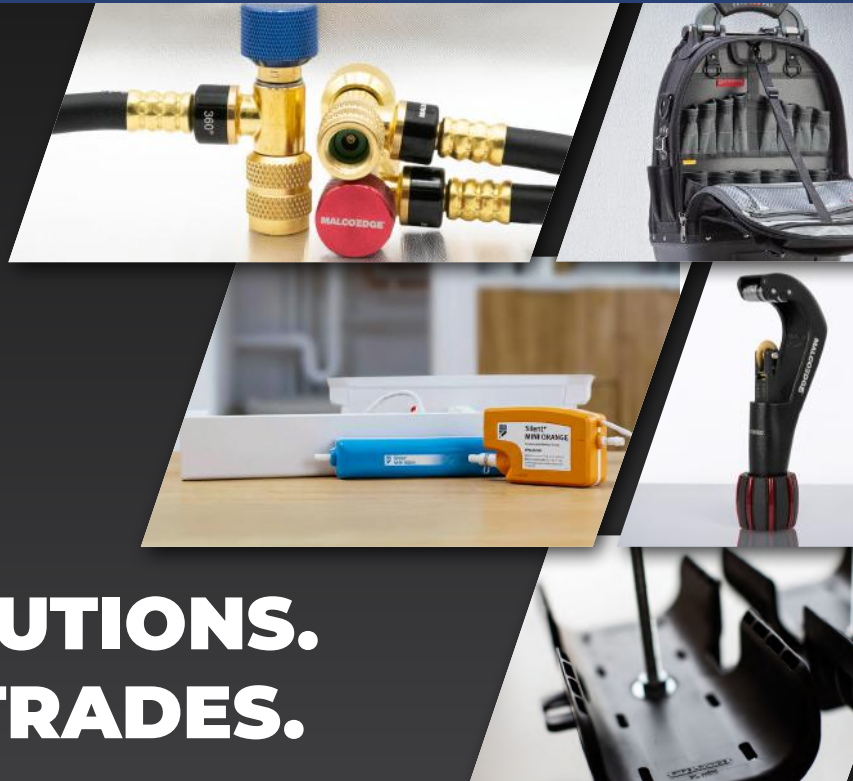
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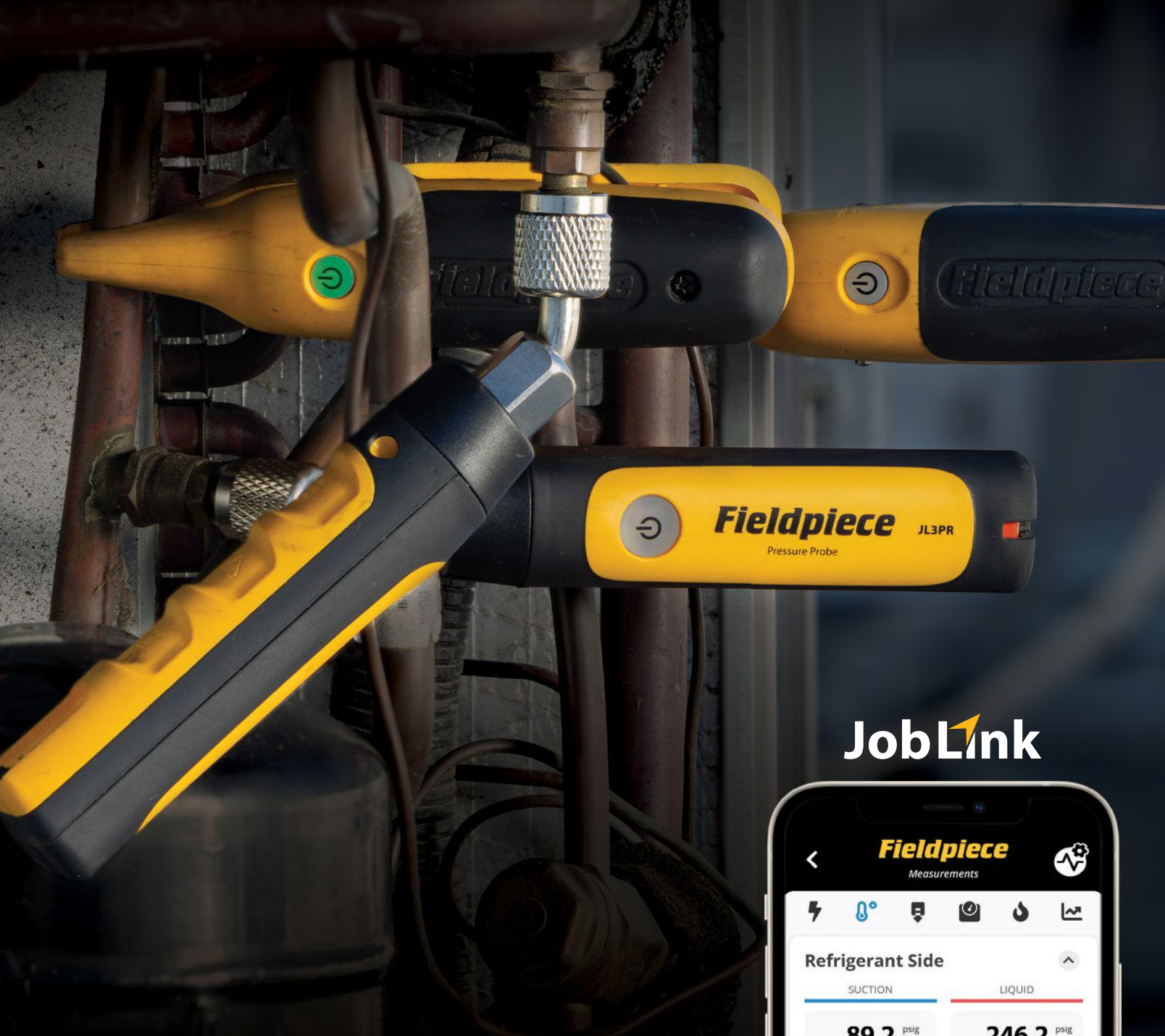
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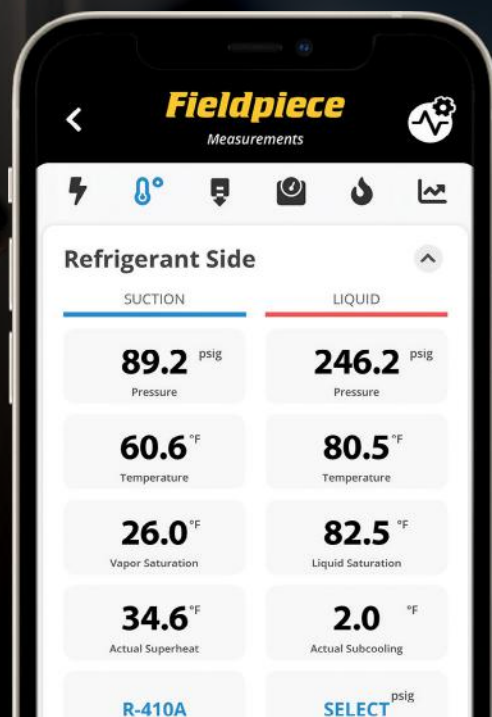
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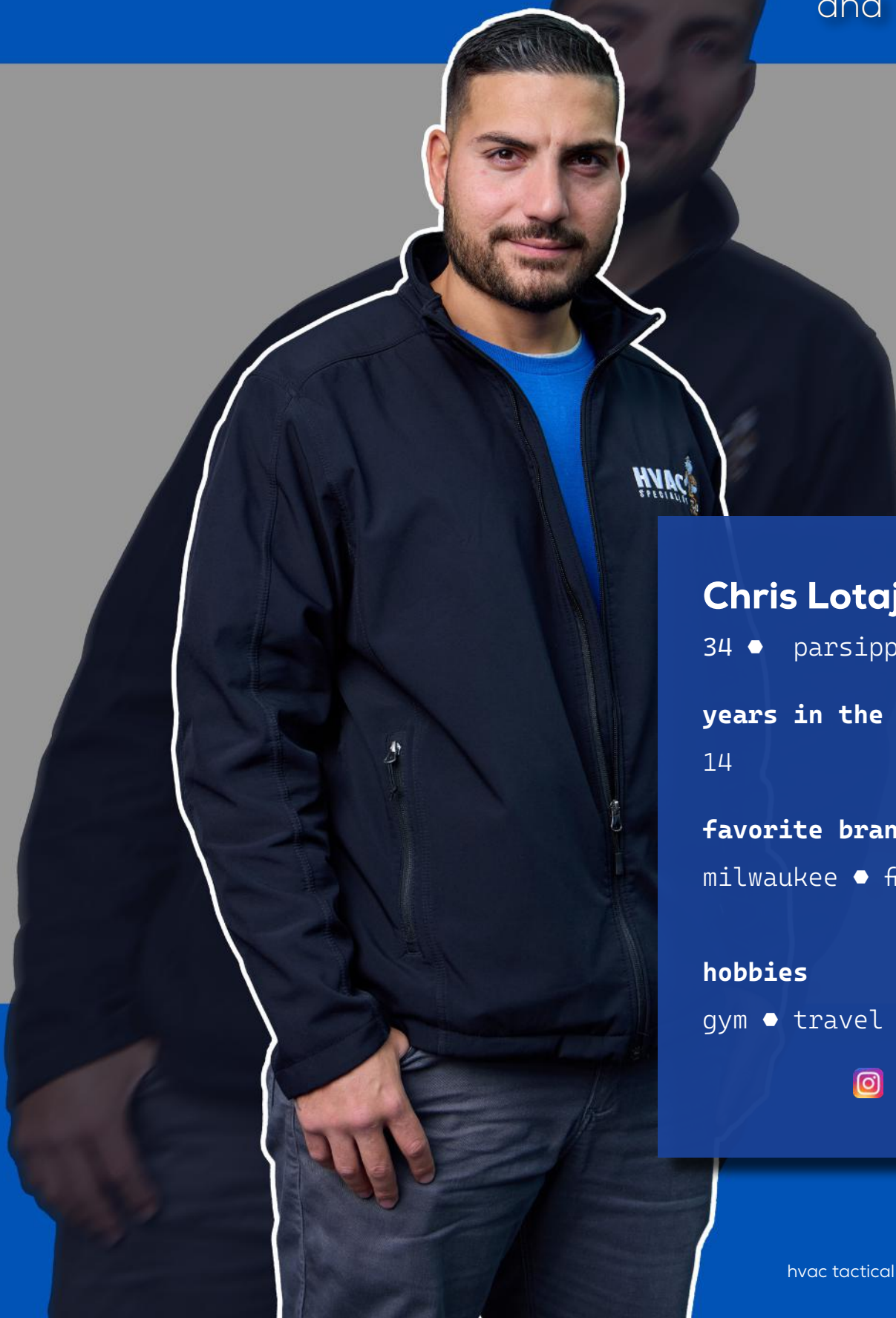
hobbies

soccer ♦ travel

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"when you reach

the end of your rope,
tie **a knot** in it,
and **hang on**"



Chris Lotaj

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years in the trade

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"Don't be afraid, Mom. You can do it"

These words, spoken from a precocious eight-year-old way back in the late 1900s, still resonate for Leslye Medina – the boss, the HVAC Mami, and a central figure in the orbit of one of the boldest figures in HVAC social media.

Those words were spoken from son to mom long

before that little chico became the one and only Louie the Boilerman, aka the HVAC Papi.

Impatient, Louie was convinced that his mother could, without doubt, pilot the car and get a move on to the next destination.



Leslye didn't have a license yet, and hadn't begun to drive, but Louie's confidence and belief in his mother has become a prevailing theme in their amazing relationship.

As Leslye tells it, the pair were waiting for their chauffeur to return so they could head over and hang out with the family. Louie, anxious to have fun with his cousins, didn't want to wait any longer.

With the same confidence and boldness we've come to associate with Mr. Medina, Louie instilled his mother with that same feeling and set her on a completely different course – a course that started with a literal road!

Leslye acquiesced; Louie can be quite convincing. They got on the road with Louie helping Leslye the whole way – a child of eight, motioning to the pedals, and explaining how the car works.

More than thirty years later, that little exchange remains a defining moment, and an anecdote that not only inspires, but also showcases an amazing dynamic between two people who are much more than business partners, but a mother/son duo that we should all look upon with admiration.

If you observe & analyze the greater HVAC Papi cinematic universe, you'll see Louie on the red carpet, zipping around the metro-NY area in his giant LED marketing machine van, making YouTube and social content loudly and boisterously and across all genres – but you'll also see the day-to-day grind of someone in the trenches running a heating & air conditioning installation and repair company.

But it wasn't always this way.

To understand the woman standing in front, alongside and behind the legendary Boilerman, you have to understand the origin story.

Leslye's story really starts back in Honduras. It wasn't until October 26th, 1980 (she knew the exact date!) that the story began to take root in the United States. Born a few years later, Luis Medina, the beloved HVAC Papi, would be born. He was a firecracker from the get-go.

But, this story is not about Louie

He's definitely a character worth writing about. It's his mama that's the leading lady in this tale. Especially, because Louie almost didn't make it.

Without the determination, perseverance, boldness, and fierce lioness parental protection - this story would be very different. Leslye came to the US with an infant boilerbaby in her arms.

Being so young, that infant did not have the proper paperwork and all the other cumbersome immigration hoops that so define a complex and overwrought system.

It was Leslye's sheer will that led to slight amnesty, a scramble to get the proper photography completed for Louie, and allowed them to leave that office still united like a mother and son should be.

A woman I have personally come to know and adore, Leslye is a fixture out in the HVAC world often accompanying the familia on trips to trainings and tradeshow.

In this capacity, perhaps a bit more of the maternal instinct comes out, as Leslye uses a bunch of animal metaphors to describe what happens on the road.

She's a hawk - fiercely watching and protecting her nest. She's a lioness - fearlessly patrolling and keeping her lion cub safe (sometimes even from himself!)

She's Mother Goose - providing a lifetime of experience and helping to guide the entire clan on the proper path, while avoiding natural pitfalls and mistakes she's seen befall others in the past.



She's an eagle – ready to swoop at any time and use that impressive wingspan to shield any and all outside negativity from the fam.

Leslye is all of these things and so much more. Not only are there other lion cubs in the lineage, but Leslye is a grandmother, and also a great-grandmother.

While doing this, she's going on 5+ years helping Louie administrate their booming HVAC business, while remaining his guiding light, consultant, and grand vizier.

Before that, Leslye's resume was already impressive. Her work history boasts years of consultancy, strategy and customer service working for the likes of Chanel and RedDoor.

Asked what she liked about these past jobs, and her current occupation running the show at NY Boiler & AC Repair, she responded with a more general statement about her philosophy on life.

Leslye loves to help people.

Currently, her role running Louie's business goes further than just the day-to-day administration of dispatching, booking, sales, accounting, inventory, invoicing, HR.

She also helps keep Louie himself on the straight and narrow functioning like an executive assistant to some degree – albeit one with maternal clout far greater than a hired hand.

Leslye helps Louie keep his personal schedule together so he can juggle media, content creation, actual AC & boiler work with dental appointments, parenting commitments, and all the other in between that come with being The HVAC Papi.

To be clear, her assistance does have its limits – **she does not do Louie's laundry.**

"Everyday is a rollercoaster,"



We may fight and not always see eye to eye, but one thing I know is my mom never folds.

With age comes experience, and with time comes clarity. I've come to realize that my mom has a heart of gold and has never left me to face life alone. For that, I will always be grateful for her love and the role she has played in my life.

The protector I call Mom—truth be told, she lives in my soul.

"A mother and son's bond is forever. No matter what life brings, that bond never lets go."

Love You, Mom!

Weppa!

Leslye said with cheer in her voice. It's very easy to see that the unpredictability and variable nature of her everyday is part of the fun challenge, and a task she's definitely up for.

Professionally, Leslye doesn't have an official title because how could you put a name on the myriad and growing tasks that she deftly handles each day. It would be impossible to define her role with the blend of professionalism, woman's intuition, and fiercely devoted maternal drive that form the foundation of this incredibly strong woman.

She wouldn't say it like that – another truly remarkable aspect of Leslye is her abject humility. You can tell this is a woman with razor sharp wit, intelligence, and experience,

And yet, there is no bluster here, and the positivity seems to always emanate outward.

During our chats over the years, the focus has routinely been on uplifting others, lending a helping hand, or gently brandishing the chancleta to make sure her people stay on the right path.

One long term goal Leslye mentioned was a "single mom HVAC support group" type of concept where other women in the industry could lean for support.

More and more women are entering the trades, so sharing wisdom and experiences with folks, helping them avoid some of the same mistakes made in the past, would be an honorable and incredible





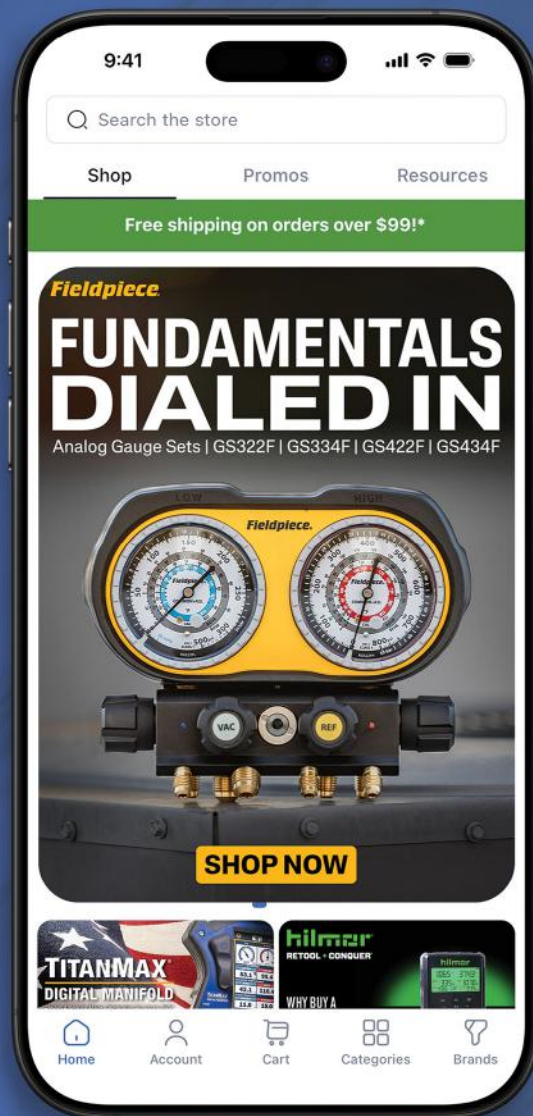
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way to further the growing female presence in the industry.

Hand-in-hand with the goal of uplifting the industry was the constant theme of education. Leslye mentioned the concept of learning, training, and education innumerable times during our conversation.

As we all in the trades know, training and continuing education is absolutely critical to stay ahead of the trends and keep abreast of the current technologies and processes. Leslye embodies this mentality – and applies it far beyond the HVAC space as well.

The social media growth of Señor Boilerman has forced Leslye to, minimally, observe the landscape of platforms like Instagram and YouTube – both locations where her son has a large and notable presence.

Admitting that social media is not exactly her forte, her always-learning mentality has led her to an understanding of the complex topic, actually furthering her support and sometimes random participation.

It's here where another central tenet of this inspiring woman's personality becomes a true lodestar for her son's content and online presence.

Above all, for better or worse, and regardless of how The HVAC Papi will react – **Leslye provides honest, unapologetic feedback.**

"I'm his first judge and his consultant. I always tell the truth," said Leslye.

If the hair color or colorful language in a video doesn't quite meet the high standards of mama, Louie will hear about it.

Louie doesn't always like the feedback. In fact, she insinuated that Louie also doesn't always take the feedback. Regardless, Leslye offers her thoughts the only way a business partner and mother could – unvarnished truth with the best intentions at the heart of it all.

On hand to help plan and support in both personal and professional contexts, Leslye has become a mainstay right at Louie's side during big tradeshow events and other media appearances.

In fact, the whole family is often in the mix. Tío, as I call him, is Leslye's brother and Louie's uncle. (Tío is Spanish for uncle, if you didn't parse that.) Moises Medina is another central figure in the story.

He works with the company, he travels with the team, and he adds to the general positivity and good vibes that glow from the Medina family writ large.

With Leslye acting as the mother hen and matriarch, the Medina family marches on to both gigantic social media galas & events, then right to the jobsites where NY AC & Boiler Repair help bring comfort to their clientele in the metro NY and Long Island areas.

Where would Tio and Louie be without Leslye providing guidance and anchoring the entire outfit? It's hard to say – but, unquestionably, her presence looms large for the better.

Her can-do spirit, combined with determination and old-fashioned hard work, has imbued her son with that same mindset.

Leslye chuckled when talking a bit about the services provided by NY Boiler and Air Conditioning Repair. Louie is ready for anything at all times. His entire approach is say yes and then find the solution. "if we don't do it, we'll invent it or figure it out" is an inspiring approach to carving out an original path and learning along the way.



Mama and son, Leslye and Louie, the front office and the front man – this pair is iconic in their uniqueness, partnership, and general kindred connection.

Leslye, indeed, got a little choked up speaking proudly and adoringly about her one-of-a-kind son.

“I feel secure with Louie.”

This type of comfort and openness is increasingly rare in our society, but Leslye’s not sugarcoating it, or doing anything without the authenticity that defines her. Sure, Louie and Leslye will butt heads here and there.

He doesn’t always like the stern professional advice or the tsk-tsky mother stuff, but they’re bonded in a way to which we all should aspire.

Towards the end of our chat, I asked Leslye what advice she’d want to give a woman (or anyone) coming up in the trade – and it circled right back to the same sentiments shared by an eight-year-old Louie impatiently waiting in the car.

“Don’t be afraid. You can do it. Nothing is impossible.”

Leslye, along with her faith as a shield, takes these words, stands by them and stands up to whatever challenge lays ahead – if there is something she doesn’t know, she’ll learn it. If it’s something new, she’ll try it.

She’s ready to evolve, experiment, and grow as a person, a friend, a mother, a sister, an HVAC professional, a social media figure, and so much more.

Louie told her: don’t be afraid.

She definitely took his advice.



Matthew Pryce

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LEARN HOW IT WORKS

the numbers don't lie but **good**, **okay**, and **fine** sure do.

Good is not a measurement.

Let's start with a simple question.

A technician writes "pressures good" in a service ticket. Another technician writes "118 psig suction, 285 psig head pressure, 12°F superheat, and 8°F subcooling."

Which technician would you trust?

In the HVACR world, everything we do is based on numbers. Pressures, temperatures, voltages, amperage, resistance, airflow, gas pressure, superheat, subcooling, vacuum levels—the list goes on.

These numbers are a window into what a system is doing.

They tell a story.

More importantly, they help point us to a correct diagnosis.

So why are so many technicians still documenting service calls with words like "good," "okay," "fine," or "bad" instead of recording actual measurements?

Think about how often you've read service notes that say:

- Voltage good
- Pressure okay
- Amp draw normal
- Gas pressure fine

What do any of those statements actually mean?

Absolutely nothing.

Those descriptions are subjective. What one technician considers "good" may be completely different from what another technician considers "good." They don't provide context, they don't support a diagnosis, and they certainly don't help the next technician who has to work on the equipment.

Actual readings do.

Let's take a thermostatic expansion valve (TXV) as an example. How can you condemn a TXV without taking a superheat reading? You can't. If you took the time to measure superheat,

attempted adjustments, and monitored system response, then you have data behind your conclusion. Instead of writing "TXV bad," your notes could say:

"Made multiple attempts to adjust TXV. Evaporator superheat remained above 25°F. Manufacturer target range is 6°F to 8°F. No response observed during adjustment."

Now you've documented what you found, what you expected to find, and how you arrived at your conclusion. No guessing. No assumptions. Just facts. That's especially important when dealing with warranty claims.

Manufacturers don't want opinions. They want proof. The numbers provide that proof.

In my world of commercial foodservice equipment repair, we deal with gas issues all the time. High pressure, low pressure, inadequate volume—you name it.

One of the most common notes I see is:

"Gas pressure good."

What does that even mean?

What gas pressure does the equipment require? Was the measurement taken under static or dynamic conditions? Was it incoming pressure or manifold pressure? Was the equipment operating at the time of the measurement? Those are the details we need.

I had a technician call me about a fryer that kept cutting out. He said every time he was there, the fryer worked just fine. I started with my normal questions.

"What are your gas pressures? Static and dynamic?" His instant response was, "They're good."

Of course they were.

At least he had taken millivolt readings, and those looked to be within range. I then asked if any other gas equipment on that line was running. He said yes, and that the gas pressure wasn't affected.

Yeah...right.

The reality was that he had been there early in the morning before the kitchen was operating, so nothing else was actually calling for gas. After several attempts to troubleshoot it over the phone, I went to the site myself.

The fryer required 4 inches water column at the manifold during normal operation. Here's what I found:

- **Incoming static pressure: 6.25" W.C.**
- **Dynamic pressure with only the fryer running: 4.6" W.C.**
- **Once I fired up the rest of the kitchen equipment, the gas pressure dropped to under 2" W.C.**

The gas pressures weren't "good" at all. Now I had actual numbers to take back to the customer and explain that they had a gas volume issue, not a fryer issue. Those measurements gave us the information needed to point them toward the proper repair.

Without all of those details, the note provides very little value. With specific readings written down, we know exactly what was tested and exactly what was found.

THE COST OF GUESSING

We see the same thing throughout refrigeration service. A walk-in freezer goes down and it's an emergency call. The technician arrives and later documents:

"Unit frozen up due to bad defrost timer. Voltage fine. Heater amps okay."

That note leaves the next technician guessing. The evaporator data plate tells us the expected voltage and heater amperage. If you took the time to put a meter on it, why not record the actual readings?

A better note might read:

"Defrost heater measured 7.8 amps at 208 volts during forced defrost. Manufacturer rating is 7.5 amps at 208 volts. Defrost timer failed to advance during test cycle."

Now you've documented evidence rather than assumptions. This matters because customers are becoming more educated. They're asking questions. They're scrutinizing invoices. They're requesting explanations for expensive repairs and replacements.

And honestly, they should.

When we present a customer with documented measurements and findings, we build confidence and trust. We demonstrate that we didn't simply guess at the problem. We tested, verified, and diagnosed it.

Good documentation doesn't just help the customer, either. It helps your service manager understand your decision-making process. It helps the next technician who works on the equipment. It helps warranty departments process claims. It helps manufacturers identify recurring patterns.

Most importantly, it helps you become a better technician.

The discipline required to collect and record data forces you to slow down, think critically, and verify your assumptions. Over time, that habit transforms troubleshooting from educated guessing into evidence-based diagnosis.

A technician was struggling with a walk-in cooler that kept shutting down. The evaporator fans were running, the

condenser coil was clean—you could shine a flashlight straight through it—and the unit had been installed in December when the outdoor temperatures were much cooler. As the ambient temperature started to rise, the problem became more frequent.

I asked him what his pressures and temperatures were.

"They're fine."

They're never "fine."

After several phone calls and working through the problem together, I finally had him put gauges on it. Sure enough, the pressures weren't fine.

The R448A system was running around 475 PSI and repeatedly bouncing off the high-pressure control. Unfortunately, the unit had an automatic reset high-pressure control, so it would trip, cool down, restart, and continue the cycle, making the problem seem intermittent.

I had him recover a small amount of refrigerant until the head pressure came back down to a normal operating range of around 200 PSI. Miraculously, the unit worked perfectly.

The issue wasn't mysterious—it just hadn't been measured.

Too often in this industry, we see parts replaced without sufficient testing. Multiple trips are made. Parts are changed one after another until the problem eventually disappears.

Sometimes that's not troubleshooting. It's gambling. The best technicians don't rely on luck. They rely on data.

SHOW YOUR WORK

One of the biggest reasons numbers matter is simple: they prove the work was done. Anyone can write a series of words on a service ticket. Anyone can claim a pressure was good or a voltage was fine. But when you include actual measurements, you're showing your work. You're demonstrating that you tested the system, verified the operation, and reached your conclusion based on facts.

The next time you're tempted to write "good," ask yourself a simple question:

What was the number?

Because the number tells the story.

The number supports the diagnosis.

The number builds trust.

And the number never lies.



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SCAN TO JOIN

to the new generation of HVACR technicians: **your career starts now**

If you are reading this article right now—and I know you are—you've already made one of the most exciting and important decisions in your life. You chose a skilled trade. More specifically, you chose a career in HVACR. You've already likely realized that your new career cannot be automated or outsourced. Here's an additional fun fact that further validates your decision to join the nearly 450,000 people who currently have successful HVACR careers. Of the 830 occupations that are monitored by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, only a few dozen were classified as essential during COVID-19.

As a result, many people who lost their jobs during COVID chose to get trained for careers in the HVACR industry, knowing that their jobs are less likely to be chopped when the next pandemic, or other game-changing event occurs.

Whether you've been in the field for a few weeks, a few months, or a few years, please accept this as a formal welcome to the coolest and hottest (pun intended) career in the world. Every house, school, hospital, department store, office building, supermarket, and data center depends on heating, ventilation, air conditioning, and refrigeration systems. Without skilled technicians to effectively and efficiently install, service, maintain and troubleshoot this equipment, modern life would quickly become uncomfortable, unhealthy, and in many cases, impossible.

As someone new to the trade, you may be wondering what your future holds. You may be excited, overwhelmed, frustrated, or any combination of these three. But don't stress—these feelings are completely normal. Every

experienced field technician started exactly where you are today, and some periodically experience the same stresses you're feeling right now.

The good news is that if you approach your career with the right mindset, the opportunities ahead are virtually limitless. What follows are some important things to keep in mind that I've learned over my past 45+ years in this amazing industry. I know that you're running numbers in your head trying to figure out how old I am...Stop it right now!

Never Stop Learning

Although you might think that you've learned it all from your HVACR instructors at school, or from your uncle who attended the HVACR school of hard knocks, or from that 9-pound textbook you bought online (you know the one I mean), one of the biggest surprises for many new technicians is realizing how much there still is to learn.

Yes, while you might have completed a training program, obtained certifications, earned a college degree, or graduated from an apprenticeship, these accomplishments, although very important, represent the beginning of your educational journey—not the end of it. By the way, I'm 60. A very young 60.

Technology in the HVACR industry is continually evolving.

Variable-speed systems, inverter-driven equipment, smart controls, building automation

systems, connected diagnostics, and energy-efficient technologies are becoming increasingly common. Equipment that didn't exist ten years ago is now standard in many installations. The fact is that there is a significant gap between the time a new technology is released and when that particular technology makes its way into the classroom. The fact is that many of the instructors who guided you through school have never worked on some of the equipment they taught you about in school.

Therefore, the technicians who truly thrive in this industry are the ones who remain curious and continue their training—even though they have that certificate or sheepskin hanging on the wall. They ask questions, attend training sessions, read technical literature, watch instructional videos, participate in online webinars and podcasts, and learn from experienced coworkers, peers and friends.

One of the biggest problems new field service technicians often face is themselves. In many cases, they are their own worst enemy as they have difficulty acknowledging that they do not fully understand a concept or theory. We should never be afraid to admit that we don't know something. The smartest—and most successful—technicians are often the first to ask questions

because they understand that every day brings with it new learning possibilities. They realize that the challenges and obstacles they face are simply opportunities in disguise for advancement and growth.

Master the Fundamentals

While technological advances continue to be made, the fundamental laws, theories, and concepts of thermodynamics, physics, and chemistry remain unchanged.

Airflow, the vapor-compression refrigeration cycle, electrical theory, pressure-enthalpy, combustion, psychrometrics, and heat transfer are not just subjects that are taught in the classroom. They are the underlying principles that help field service technicians accurately and efficiently understand, evaluate and diagnose system problems.

In an age where smartphones and devices are literally within reach to nearly everyone, many new technicians succumb to the temptation to rely heavily, if not solely, on smartphone apps, digital diagnostic tools, or online videos. These resources

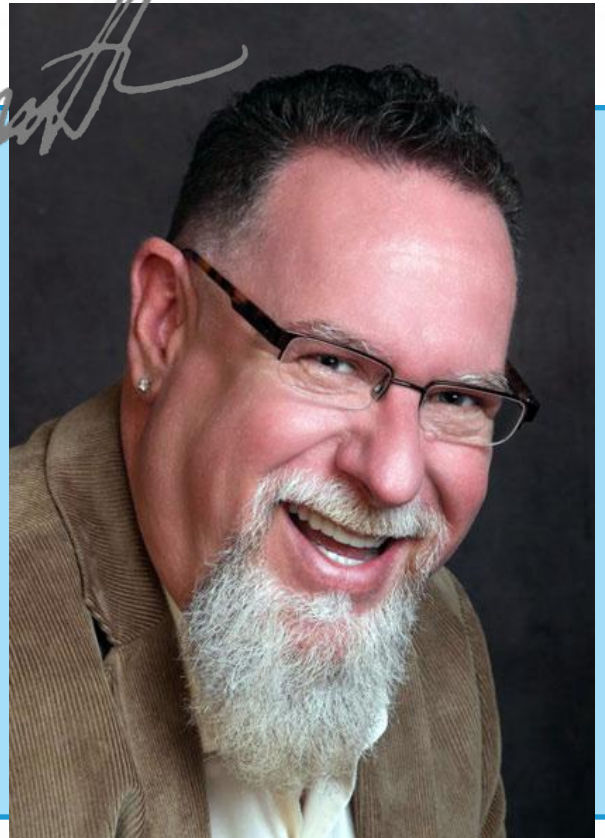
About the Author:

Eugene Silberstein, M.S., CMHE, BEAP

Eugene Silberstein has been in the HVACR industry for over 45 years and is presently the National Programs Director at HVAC Excellence (escogroup.org).

He is the lead author of many career and technical education titles including the HVACR industry's best-selling textbook, *Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Technology*, presently in its 10th Edition (cengage.com).

get in touch: eugene.silberstein@yahoo.com.



can be extremely valuable—but they should never replace a solid understanding of the fundamentals. When you fully understand why and how a system operates the way it does, troubleshooting becomes easier and, with enough practice, almost second nature. Instead of guessing or relying on technology to do the work for you, by applying your new-found knowledge and understanding, you'll be able to systematically identify, and remedy, the root cause for system malfunction or failure.

Simply put, the most successful field service technicians aren't necessarily the ones with the most toys or gadgets. They're the ones who truly understand the science behind the equipment.

Build Professional Habits

You might have great technical abilities, but that's not the only ingredient in the recipe for amazing technicians. So, what is the secret ingredient that separates average field service technicians from great ones? It's professionalism!

How you act on the job is just as important as, if not more important than, what you do on the job. Here are some examples of professional habits that you should immediately implement if you have not already done so:

- Arrive on time, every time
- Use appropriate language
- Keep your truck clean and organized, inside and out
- Maintain your tools
- Complete work orders and paperwork neatly, accurately, and completely
- Communicate clearly with customers and coworkers
- Take pride in your appearance
- Observe the rules of the road

These habits, although very easy to put into action, can have a tremendous impact on your career and those you interact with. Your supervisors will notice. Your customers will notice. Your coworkers will notice. And, more importantly, you will notice.

Learn From Experienced Technicians

One of the greatest resources available to you is the experience of the seasoned technicians you work and associate with. Most HVACR industry veterans have spent many decades solving problems, making mistakes, and learning valuable lessons. Their knowledge cannot be found in a textbook.

When you work alongside experienced technicians, pay careful attention. Observe how they approach their work. Specifically, observe how they diagnose equipment, interact with customers, maintain their work vehicle, organize their work, communicate with coworkers and supervisors, and manage difficult situations. Here are some things you should do when working with experienced technicians:

- Ask relevant questions
- Listen carefully
- Respect their knowledge and authority
- Take notes
- Become a trustworthy colleague
- Be willing to do what is asked of you
- Give your opinion when asked
- Learn from the mistakes you make
- Show appreciation for their help



The HVACR industry has a long tradition of camaraderie and mentorship. Experienced technicians are more willing to help those who show a true desire to learn. If you take the initiative and exude a sincere interest in bettering yourself, you are more likely to benefit from working with experienced technicians. For the most part, every generation of HVACR technicians helps train the next. Who knows? One day you might have the opportunity to pass your knowledge along to the next generation of eager HVACR field service technicians!

Focus on Safety...Every Day!

Many new service technicians focus primarily on speed and productivity. While efficiency is important, safety must always come first. You can't be productive if you are injured and can't work.

In the HVACR industry, field personnel work on and around electricity, refrigerants, combustible fuels, rotating machinery, and a wide variety of chemicals. In addition, technicians are expected to work in confined spaces, are required to work on ladders and elevated platforms, and are exposed to extreme temperatures.

Regardless of how well we prepare to prevent accidents from occurring, the reality is that accidents do happen. To help minimize the likelihood and severity of an injury, keep the following in mind:

- **Avoid taking shortcuts**
- **Wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE)**
- **Follow lockout/tagout procedures**
- **Avoid using damaged tools**
- **Know proper first aid procedures**
- **Never exceed the limitations of a tool**
- **Do not wear loose/baggy clothing**
- **Use ladders properly**

- **Handle refrigerants responsibly**
- **Avoid wearing metallic or hanging/dangling jewelry**
- **Use tools only for the job they are intended to perform**
- **Stay hydrated on the job**
- **Keep tools clean and free from oil**
- **Be aware of your surroundings and any trip/fall hazards**
- **Work in well-ventilated areas**
- **Avoid impairment (drug- or alcohol-related) while on the job**
- **Verify equipment is de-energized, whenever possible or practical, before working on electrical components**

A successful career is not measured by how many jobs you complete. Success is measured by how safely and consistently you perform high-quality work over many years.

Develop Exceptional People Skills...Now!

Many people enter the HVACR industry because they like to work with their hands and—hopefully—fix things! What many people who are new to our industry don't know is that good customer communication skills are as important as knowing how to install, maintain and troubleshoot equipment.

Consider two technicians. Technician "A" is an amazing technician and can quickly and accurately find the problem with a system 100% of the time. This technician's callback rate is very close to zero.

However, Technician "A" does not possess the ability to effectively communicate with the customer. Technician "A" often comes across as standoffish and unresponsive to the needs and concerns of the customer. Technician "B," on the other hand, is an average technician, who gets system diagnosis right about 75% of the time, and his work regularly requires additional visits and callbacks.

However, Technician "B" has the proverbial golden tongue when it comes to customer communication. This technician is personable,



A decorative image on the left side of the page. It features two wooden figures with spherical heads and conical bodies, one blue and one red. Below them are four wooden blocks of decreasing height, each with a dark brown arrow pointing upwards. The background is a solid light gray.

approachable, and able to effectively engage with customers. This technician understands the customer's concerns, addresses them, and continually conveys information at a level that aligns with the customer's level of understanding and desired involvement. Now, the big question: Which technician is more valuable to the service company? In many instances, Technician "B" might—in reality—be more valuable. Over the years, I've actually employed both types of technicians, and have, on more than one occasion, had a customer request that Technician "B" return to their home, even though he failed to get the diagnosis right the first time!

Customers will likely not remember every detail of a system repair, but they will definitely remember how they were treated and how the interaction with the service company, specifically the technician, made them feel. Keep in mind that the customer's interaction with the service technician is often the only face-to-face encounter that occurs.

So, here are some suggestions when dealing face-to-face with a customer:

- Take the time to explain problems clearly
- Avoid unnecessary technical jargon
- Listen to customer concerns
- Be professional
- Demonstrate honesty and integrity
- Be compassionate
- Respect the customer's property

Build Your Network

Yes, it's true that technical skills are essential to help ensure success in our industry, but the relationships you build throughout your career are just as valuable.

One of the best ways to grow personally and professionally is by connecting with others who presently work, or who have worked, in the HVACR industry.

Connecting is as easy as attending local workshops, manufacturer training events, trade shows, and industry conferences whenever possible. HVAC Excellence's National Education Conference is a great option—but, of course, I'm just a little biased!

Events such as these expose you to new technologies, best practices, and experienced professionals who can share valuable insights from the field.

Take advantage of online learning opportunities as well. Webcasts, webinars, podcasts, and virtual training sessions allow you to learn from industry experts and stay informed about emerging trends, products, and regulations, often long before this valuable information finds its way into a textbook. Many industry organizations and manufacturers offer free educational content—yes, free—that can help expand your knowledge and professional connections.

Of course, never underestimate the value of joining professional associations, participating in local trade groups, or engaging in industry-focused social media communities. Ask questions, share experiences, and seek out mentors who can help guide you as you map out your career. The HVACR industry is built on relationships, and the connections you make today may lead to future job opportunities, technical support, career advice, and lifelong friendships.

Think About Tomorrow, and the Day After, and the Day After...

Early in your career, it can often be difficult to see far beyond the next service call. However, the skills you develop today can open doors to options you haven't even considered yet. It's important to understand that HVACR offers multiple career paths.

Working as a field service technician can take its toll on backs and knees. But don't let that discourage you. Wearing proper braces and pads will help ensure that you'll have a long, healthy career in HVACR. The reality is—we all get older and our bodies cannot always deliver what our minds tell us we can.

Even after your days crawling in attics and climbing ladders end, other exciting options lie ahead. Some move into system design, energy management, training, technical support, manufacturing, sales, content creator, or even business ownership.

Don't measure your success solely by your current position. Instead, focus on continuous improvement. Every skill you learn—and every

challenge you overcome—adds value to your future and your continued contributions to this amazing industry.

The Future Is Brighter Than Ever

The HVACR industry faces an ongoing demand for dedicated, skilled professionals. As experienced technicians retire and technology continues to advance, amazing opportunities for motivated technicians continue to surface.

Your career will not be defined by what you knew yesterday—or even what you know today. It will be defined by your willingness to learn, adapt, and improve over time. Your career will become the culmination of all you've done—and contributed—over the years. So, I would like to leave you with five takeaways from this article:

- Stay curious
- Work hard
- Be professional
- Invest in your education
- Take pride in your craft

If you do these things consistently, you won't simply have a job—you'll build a rewarding and successful career in one of the most important industries in the world.

The future of HVACR is in your hands, and that future has never looked brighter.

battle of the trades 2026:

the ending nobody saw coming

On July 11, 2026, in La Habra, California, a crowd gathered expecting one thing: an all-out showdown between two trades—electricians versus HVAC technicians. Pride was on the line. Bragging rights were at stake. Everyone came expecting to find out, once and for all, which trade would come out on top.

What unfolded was something much bigger.

The competition opened with the Screw Challenge, a pure speed event that quickly trimmed the field down to eight electricians and eight HVAC technicians. It was fast, intense, and exactly what everyone expected.

One expected: spectators from the opposing trade began coaching them from the sidelines. Electricians were giving HVAC technicians pointers on conduit bending. HVAC technicians were encouraging electricians as they worked through refrigeration copper. For a brief moment, the rivalry disappeared. It was almost as if everyone wanted to see the other trade succeed.

By the end of Round Two, only four competitors remained—two electricians and two HVAC technicians.

Round Three was intentionally designed to force a complete change in mindset. Instead of



Round Two was the curveball that forced each trade into the other's world. Electricians had to bend refrigeration copper using proper refrigeration tools, while HVAC technicians had to bend EMT conduit using the same tools electricians use every day.

Quality mattered just as much as speed, and it humbled a lot of people. Suddenly, everyone began to understand just how much skill the other trade brings to the table.

As competitors struggled through unfamiliar territory, the crowd started doing something no

another head-to-head matchup, one electrician and one HVAC technician became teammates, throwing everything they thought they knew about the competition out the window.

Together they had to install a subpanel, install breakers, bend and run conduit, pull wire, install a disconnect, wire the disconnect to the condensing unit, and pipe refrigeration lines between the outdoor unit and the air handler.

It wasn't about beating the other trade anymore. It was about adapting, communicating, and getting the job done with the person standing



next to you—all things a true master of their craft should be able to do.

If you're too busy blowing smoke about other trades, you're missing the point. Collaboration is exactly what makes a job site work. No building goes up because one trade is better than another.

It gets built when every trade does its job and works with the people around them. That's a lesson worth remembering.

Anyway...back to the competition.

Only one team advanced, leaving one electrician and one HVAC technician standing. The championship round had arrived.

Under the hot Southern California sun, both competitors were drenched in sweat as they battled through one final test.

They flew through the Screw Challenge, finishing only seconds apart before sprinting to the bending station. Both attacked the copper and EMT without hesitation, and to everyone's amazement, they finished almost simultaneously.

All eyes were on the judges. But speed was only part of the score, remember? The quality of the bends would determine the champion. The judges looked everything over.
A tie.

A tie?! As a third-generation HVAC guy, I'll admit it—I had mixed emotions. Part of me wanted HVAC to walk away with the win.

The crazy part, though?

The HVAC technician produced the better EMT bends. The electrician produced the better refrigeration copper bends. Each competitor mastered a piece of the other's craft when it mattered most.

That's exactly why the Battle of the Trades exists.

Yeah, the trash talk is fun. The memes are entertaining and make great content. But beneath all of the rivalry is a much bigger purpose.

The event was called the Battle of the Trades. But in the end, the biggest victory belonged to the trades themselves, because for one day, thousands of people were reminded that we're all on the same team.

No champion.

No loser.

Just a little more respect for one another.

And maybe that's exactly the ending nobody saw coming.

If 2026 ended in a draw...what happens in 2027 when the battle resets?

-Ben Poole
hvac tactical



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THE EH-TEAM ELEVATE YOUR TRADE



The Social Hub wasn't just another CMPX booth, it was where the show came alive!

From the moment the doors opened, a kind of kinetic energy drew people in. It wasn't about product displays or polished pitches. It was movement, noise, conversations, and constant interaction. Contractors stopped by, and they stayed. Apprentices asked questions they seldom get to ask on-site. Students stepped into a space that felt less like an exhibit, and more like the real world they're working toward.

Built on the mindset of Community Over Competition, the Social Hub brought together every level of the trade into one shared environment; not to compete for attention, but to exchange knowledge, experiences, and perspectives that actually matter on the job.

At the center of it all was the **EH-TEAM**, bolstered by a strong group of industry partners who helped turn square footage into much more than a standard show setup.

Manufacturers, distributors and tradespeople worked side by side; not in silos, but as part of one collaborative effort. That dynamic was visible in every aspect, from the tools and techniques to equipment demos to conversations all over the floor.

Throughout the day, activity never slowed down. Hands-on challenges attracted crowds. Live demos turned into group discussions. There were no scripts, no one to impress, no pressure to sell; just real talk about tools, installs, mistakes, lessons learned, and the day-to-day reality of working in the trades.

That's what made it unique. It wasn't just networking, it was connecting with people who've worked in the field, who've figured things out - sometimes the hard way, and who were willing to share that knowledge openly.

For those new to the trade, it offered clarity, direction and incentive. For experienced pros, it reinforced something special; that the industry moves forward faster when knowledge is shared, not withheld.



The Social Hub didn't just bring people together, it showed what the future of trade shows, and the trades themselves, can look like when collaboration leads the way.

It wasn't something you just walked through. It was something you became part of.

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"The CMPX show has become more than a showcase for exhibitors; it is now an event where young people entering the HVAC and plumbing trades can come and talk to senior technicians and representatives to learn and discuss what being in the trades is all about. This was very evident at the Social Hub, where the **EH-TEAM** put on a show with all their members, sharing tricks, tips, and insight into the HVAC world. Elevating your trade and collaboration before competition is what it is all about."

Ilija Martinovich
@the_hvac_foodie



"As the **EH-TEAM** continues to grow, so does its depth of talent and field experience. CMPX remains a great opportunity to meet new members and reconnect with the original"

Ben Poole
@hvactactical

THANKS TO OUR MEDIA PARTNERS

HVAC XCHANGER, HVAC Tactical, HRAI, CIPH and Impetus Media for supporting the **EH-TEAM** mission to Elevate the Trades and help drive our education movement forward.



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OEM Spotlight - with Lianna Schwalenberg

What is Taco?

Taco, founded in 1920 as the Thermal Appliance Company (TACO), is a pump and accessory components manufacturer for hydronic heating, cooling, and plumbing applications. Some of their most recognizable product lines are their circulators, valves, air separators, and expansion tanks.

The company began and to this day remains family-owned and operated. We sat down with John "Johnny" Hazen White, Jr., Owner and Executive Chairman of Taco, to talk about the company, as well as provide some insight on what it takes to build and maintain a highly-respected and relevant business for over a century.

Taco is a family-led company with deep roots in innovation and manufacturing. How did the leadership of Elwood White, John Hazen White Sr., and now John Hazen White Jr. help shape the company into what it is today?

When asked about his grandfather Elwood White, who founded the Thermal Appliance Company in 1920, Johnny reflected on the legacy Elwood left behind. "He saw a need; he built the cornerstone of this company and he believed in manufacturing. That spirit is still very much alive today."

Johnny's father, John Hazen White Sr., carried the company through a very different era, taking over after Elwood White

passed away. "He led with discipline, resilience, and a deep belief in the business process," said Johnny. Under his father's leadership,

Taco solidified its manufacturing strength and product reliability, creating a foundation that allowed the company to grow into a manufacturing powerhouse by the time Johnny stepped into leadership. However, it quickly became clear to Johnny that while people came to work and did their jobs well, many didn't feel fully connected to the business.

"I wanted to understand what employees thought about our processes, working conditions, and opportunities for improvement," Johnny recalled. "More importantly, I wanted to build a company where people felt heard, valued, and genuinely invested in our shared success." A relationship-driven leader at his core, Johnny wanted strong relationships with his employees, business partners, representatives, installers, engineers, and contractors. "I want to understand their challenges, hear their feedback, and learn from their experiences—whether positive or negative. Those conversations help us improve and strengthen our business."

When asked about his impact on the company today, Johnny replied, "Every day, I strive to make Taco a great place to work. Nothing gives me greater satisfaction than seeing the company and people I care about so deeply come together to accomplish great things."

Johnny's sons, John and Ben, joined the business while they were still young, working on the shop floor, cleaning up and learning the fundamentals. As they grew, they took on greater responsibilities, but they had to learn the business by working in it—earning their experience firsthand. When asked how it felt keeping the company in the family for four generations with Ben becoming president last year, Johnny said, "What I admire most is the confidence he has developed and his ability to think critically and make sound decisions. He leads with humility, and his servant leadership is evident in everything he does. Working alongside him and helping guide the business we have built together is one of the greatest joys of my life."

Johnny's son, John, passed away in 2022, and Johnny began to see life through a very different lens. "Much changed in the years that followed. What never changed, however, was John's presence in our lives and the unwavering support and love of the

people who helped build this company."

As a trusted name in hydronics for more than 100 years, how do you balance innovation and evolving efficiency standards while maintaining the reliability and simplicity contractors have trusted for generations?

"You balance these standards and preferences by remembering who innovation is developed for. Innovation is not done for the sake of innovation. Innovation is developed for the person in the field who must make the product work on a job site, sometimes under pressure, and often with someone waiting for heat, cooling, hot water, or comfort."

In the development stages of product innovation, Taco asks the following questions:

Does this help the contractor?

Does this help the wholesaler?

Does this help the engineer or the building owner?

Does this help the system perform better?

Only when the answers to all those questions are "yes" will the product be on the right path.

"The mistake some companies make," Johnny emphasized to us, "is thinking that advanced technology must be complicated. It does not. The best technology often makes things easier." While the future demands efficiency, intelligence, and performance, Taco aims to strike a balance between the two—keeping up with evolving efficiency standards and positive customer experiences, such as dependability, understandability, and the overall feeling of being supported.

When asked what has allowed the company to remain relevant and respected for so long, Johnny said, "Taco has been very fortunate." But he followed with, "our success wasn't automatic. Every generation running this business has had challenges. I think the reason Taco remains relevant is simple. We have stayed close to the people who depend on us. Contractors, wholesalers, engineers, OEM partners, installers, employees, families, and communities."

For Johnny, building relationships and building trust are the foundation for manufacturing great products. He elaborated, "A contractor must trust that when they put a Taco product into their system, the product is going to do what it is supposed to do. A wholesaler must trust that we will support them. An engineer must trust that we understand their system and our employees must trust that the company is going to do the right thing in the long run. That is how you stay relevant for more

than 100 years. You keep learning, you keep investing, and you keep changing where you need to change. At Taco we have never strayed from the values that got us here."

The Taco 007 circulator recently celebrated its 50th anniversary. What made the 007 such a revolutionary product, and why has it remained an industry staple for decades?

One of the most popular pumps in the HVAC industry is the Taco 007. "It became a legendary product because we built a workhorse quality product that worked," said Johnny. "That may sound too simple, but in this industry, ease of use and reliability matter. The 007 is a product that contractors can understand, easy to install, and service."

Reflecting on the 007's 50 years of influence, Johnny told us, "There is a huge sense of pride for me when you asked about the 007 turning 50. For me, we are not just talking about a product anniversary. We are talking about the thousands and thousands of people who made it, sold it, installed it, serviced it, and trusted it. That is what makes it so special to me and to my company."

The HVAC industry is currently navigating the Department of Energy's transition from AC-induction motors to high-efficiency ECMs for circulators. How is Taco helping the industry adapt?

The industry's transition to high-efficiency ECM circulators represents a significant change, but the key is making that change understandable and practical by providing customers with the education and product selection they need.

"Taco's role is to make the transition easier," Johnny replied. "We have products like the 007e that carry forward the performance profile contractors know and trust, that will now be built into a high-efficiency ECM platform."

Emphasizing his commitment to contractors, wholesalers, and system designers who will be experiencing the changes on the ground, Johnny added, "We do not want folks to feel like they are losing the simplicity and dependability they trust. We want them to feel like they are moving forward with a company and a product that has been beside them for generations. Our commitment to our contractors, wholesalers, engineers, and customers is that we will make the ECM line of product to the same quality standards that they have come to depend on."

What are some of the latest innovations or product developments you're most excited about right now?

Johnny said there's a lot happening at Taco right now. "It is an exciting time to be in this industry. We are very focused on high-efficiency circulators and helping the market move toward ECM technology in a way that feels practical and smart. That technology shift is a major part of our next chapter."

For example, the 007e carries forward the "same performance profile that contractors know and trust" while transitioning to a high-efficiency ECM platform. The company is also working to develop products with variable speed pumping, smarter controls, and plumbing solutions that help people design and manage systems more effectively.

While it's overwhelming to think about all the changes the industry is moving through and how the products are becoming smarter, Johnny told us that, "the goal at Taco is still very human—make the system easier to design, easier to install, easier to maintain, and better for the people who depend on them."

Your company is known for more than just products. How does it support the broader HVAC community through training, education, partnerships, and workforce development?

"I have always believed a company like ours has a responsibility beyond the product. We have a responsibility to the people who work at Taco, the people who sell our products, the people who install them, and the communities we serve," Johnny responded.

Training and education are a big part of Taco's culture. The company opened the Taco Learning Center because it believes education shouldn't stop when someone takes a job. Employees, customers, reps, contractors, partners—and even competitors—benefit when learning is part of the culture.

On workforce development, Johnny emphasized that, "Taco is an employee-first company. We take care of our employees, and our employees will take care of our customers. My hope is that if someone spends time with us, that they are better for it." He continued that in taking care of their employees, people will see that manufacturing, the trades, engineering, service, design, and technical work are honorable and meaningful career paths. "This

industry needs smart, capable, and talented people.”

What advice would you give to younger professionals entering the HVAC industry today, especially those interested in innovation, geothermal, or sustainable system design?

“I would tell them to come into this industry with curiosity and respect.” Johnny explained to us that, “curiosity is important because there is so much to learn. This industry touches homes, schools, hospitals, factories, data centers, communities, and the environment. If you are interested in a career that makes a real difference, this industry is one where you can make a real impact.”

He continued, “Respect matters too. Respect the installer in the field and the contractor who has been doing this work for 30 years. Respect the wholesaler who knows what people need every day and the engineer who is trying to solve a complicated system problem. Respect the person on the factory floor who knows about the making of a product that you will never learn from a spreadsheet.”

For those looking to invent something, Johnny remarked that, “the best innovators listen to a chorus of people and ideas. They do not approach an issue thinking they know everything.

They want to understand the work, the people, and the problem. If young professionals bring that curiosity and respect for different viewpoints to the table, they will have a bright future in this industry.”

As Taco approaches its next chapter, what opportunities or challenges are most exciting for the company and the industry overall?

Being in the business for over a century, Taco is no stranger to the fact that progress and change are inevitable.

Some of the current issues the company is addressing are energy efficiency, decarbonization, water conservation, workforce development, and manufacturing efficiency, just to name a few. “Taco’s blessing is that we have one of the most talented collections of people who come to work every day and focus on these issues,” said Johnny.

In closing remarks, Johnny told us that for Taco, “the opportunity is to keep doing what we have always done: make dependable products, support the people who use them, invest in learning, and look far enough ahead that we are ready for what is coming.”

I do not believe Taco’s story has ever been just about products. Products are important. The larger story is our people.

If our people are **safe, supported, challenged,** and proud of what they do, the rest will happen. Taco’s next chapter gives us an opportunity to prove again that manufacturing is innovative, human, responsible, and deeply connected to the communities we serve.”

About the Author:

Lianna Schwalenberg is a service technician for the K Company, a mechanical contractor with over 50 years experience pursuing excellence in design, installation, energy management, and service, for commercial, industrial, and residential HVAC/R settings, located in Akron, OH.

Lianna has a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, with a minor in Environmental Studies, and an Associate of Applied Science in HVAC Technology from Stark State College.

She argues that people like herself who own fish or aquatic turtles intrinsically understand the dynamic relationship between water and air.



GRIT Foundation:

Leilani Orr, executive director

Mentorship, Curiosity, and a Better Way to Grow the Trades

The skilled trades need more than people who can follow instructions. They need problem-solvers, teachers, leaders, and lifelong learners.

Those qualities don't develop by accident, nor are they built through technical training alone. The future of the trades depends on intentional mentorship and training that helps people think through problems, not simply memorize answers.

Growth and Resilience in Trades (GRIT) Foundation

is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit introducing youth to the skilled trades through hands-on camps and workshops, while also encouraging a better model of mentorship within the trades themselves.

Founded by Bryan Orr of HVAC School and Kalos Services, and Ruchir Shah of SkillCat, GRIT was born out of a clear need: to support the professionals already in the field while helping them become better equipped to mentor, teach, and grow those alongside and after them.

We want young people to experience real tools, real mentors, and real learning. At the same time, GRIT exists to support the tradespeople already in the field who have the ability to shape today's apprentices and tomorrow's technicians, leaders, and mentors.



When we talk about mentors at GRIT, we are talking about skilled tradespeople: technicians, trainers, business owners, and experienced professionals willing to use their knowledge to guide someone else.

A mentor is not just someone who possesses knowledge. A mentor is someone who helps another person develop.

GRIT's Head of Training, Ty Branaman, plays a central role in bringing hands-on learning

experiences to life. As we develop our programs, Ty helps shape how they work on the ground, how we support mentors, and how students learn the "why" behind the work.

In the trades, knowledge is often passed down person to person. Someone lets you ride along. Someone shows you how to use a tool, troubleshoot a system, or think through a problem.

Every experienced technician carries knowledge that can't be found in a textbook, and mentorship is how that knowledge survives. That transfer of knowledge has always mattered, but it needs to be more intentional.

Too often, training becomes quick answers and specific directions: "Do this." "Don't do that." "Here's the fix." There is a time and place for direct instruction—especially with safety. When every lesson begins and ends with the solution, learners can be left with weak habits of observation, troubleshooting, and the critical thinking that underpins the trades. As a result, we miss a key opportunity to develop judgment and understanding.

That is why GRIT uses mentorship and the Socratic method as a core part of our approach. The Socratic method is a way of teaching through thoughtful questions. Instead of leading with answers, we lead with questions. A good mentor might ask:

"What do you notice?"

"Why do you think that happened?"

"What would you test next?"

"What changes if we try it this way?"

At a GRIT Camp, this may look like a student using a drill or reading a blueprint for the first time. A mentor could easily step in, take over, and finish the task for them. Instead, the mentor slows the moment down. They ask the student what they notice, where the material feels secure, what

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might happen if the angle changes, or what they think the next step should be.

The student is still being guided...and being trusted to think. This builds confidence.

Most people treat confidence and competence as separate. In the trades, they're deeply connected. Confidence is often a byproduct of competence. As learners develop understanding and judgment, they begin to trust their own ability to solve problems and make decisions.

That same model transfers directly into the field. An experienced technician working with an apprentice can either say, "Replace this part," or they can ask:

"What are you seeing?"

"What would you check first?"

"What does that reading tell you?"

That shift matters. It turns a repair into a

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learning moment.

Over time, those moments compound. The apprentice begins to recognize patterns, trust their observations, and work through problems with less dependence on someone else providing the answer.

It helps the apprentice build judgment, not just task competence. The goal is not simply to complete today's repair. The goal is to develop technicians who can diagnose, adapt, and continue learning throughout their careers. A good mentor knows when to step in and when to step back.

We hear a lot about the labor shortage in the trades. But at GRIT, we also talk about the exposure gap and the mentorship gap.

The exposure gap is straightforward: many young people have never seen the trades up close.

The mentorship gap is different. Many new technicians have not been trained by people equipped to teach with patience and purpose.

Many experienced tradespeople have tremendous knowledge, but have never been shown how powerful their influence can be when they move from simply providing solutions to guided discovery.

For years, people in the trades have said, "This is what we need. More exposure. Better mentorship. A better way to grow people." GRIT Foundation exists to put those ideas into practice.

Through camps, workshops, mentors, volunteers, and industry partners, we are creating opportunities for young people to discover the trades while helping experienced professionals become more intentional teachers, coaches, and leaders. In the process, we're strengthening the relationships and knowledge-sharing that help the trades grow.

We want youth to discover that meaningful work can engage both the mind and the hands, requiring creativity, curiosity, and problem-solving along the way.

We also want skilled tradespeople to recognize mentorship as one of the most valuable tools they carry for developing others, preserving hard-earned knowledge, and building meaningful connections across generations of tradespeople.

Real tools matter. Real work matters. But real mentorship may be what changes everything.

Because real mentorship does more than help someone complete a task. It helps them become the kind of person who can keep learning, keep solving, and eventually become the mentor someone else needs.



About the Author:

Leilani Orr is the Executive Director of GRIT Foundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that introduces youth to the skilled trades through hands-on learning and strengthens mentorship among tradespeople.

With over 20 years connected to the HVAC and skilled trades industry, Leilani helps lead GRIT's programs, partnerships, fundraising, and mission communication.

She is passionate about helping young people discover meaningful work while supporting tradespeople as mentors who can teach, guide, and invest in others."





There are two ways I come to connect with other leaders in the HVAC/R community.

One is while loudly performing, of course; the other is while quietly observing.

When people don't know they're being watched, they tend to candidly embody their most genuine traits. In one such instance of research and reflection, I stumbled upon a podcast and host that both seem to pour on passion that leaks all over so many divisions of our industry that I found myself believing all those different divisions might just have a shot at unifying one day.

Hope isn't typically the emotion that overcomes me while researching for this column, but leaders like Rhydon Atzenhoffer seem to carry a little extra hope around for everyone in their Carhartt pocket...

Welcome to HVAC R&D Podcast!

In the world of social media, where everyone wants to look like they have the cleanest install, the biggest van wrap, the most followers, the most sponsors, the best tool bag, the smartest hot take, and the most perfectly lit jobsite selfie, HVAC R&D feels refreshingly human.

Livin' Live

Jennifer Manzo

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Misfits of HVAC Podcast

INSIDE the HVAC/r PODCAST CIRCUIT



HVAC R&D

It reminds listeners that behind every logo, podcast, product, company, or training program is a person who started somewhere.

Hosted by the "Ramblin' Rhyno" himself, HVAC R&D is a one-of-a-kind, conversation-driven podcast featuring a wide range of discussion topics such as: HVAC, plumbing, electrical, business, leadership, mental health, entrepreneurship, and many other blue collar contemplations.

With guests like Julian Scadden (Nexstar Network), John Mesenbrink (Mechanical Hub), and Scott Pierson (Parts Town) mixed in with everyday distributors, technicians, and influencers, every member of the #TradeCrew

is guaranteed representation and new knowledge to take back to their own corner of HVAC/R.

HVAC R&D was born during the COVID-19 pandemic—a time when the world felt disconnected and scary. The trades (deemed essential workers), however, had to keep moving.

What started as a way to connect the disconnected has grown into a platform where thousands of followers gather to hear stories from across the skilled trades. The show brings on technicians, contractors, business leaders, manufacturers, distributors, educators, innovators, and people who are doing the very unglamorous but extremely necessary work of moving this industry forward. It is not always polished. It is not always predictable.

There is something special about a host who can bring on a guest from nearly any corner of the trades and make the conversation feel less like an interview and more like you accidentally overheard the most interesting conversation at the supply house counter. That is the magic of HVAC R&D.

Rhydon brings a perspective that the HVAC/R industry desperately needs more of. He is not looking at the trade through only one windshield. He understands the contractor side, the distributor side, manufacturers, reps, relationships, and the beautiful disaster that happens when all of those worlds depend on each other but do not always communicate very well.

Rhydon has a way of pulling stories out of people. He gives his guests room to be more than their job title. That is one of the reasons his show matters. The trades are full of brilliant people who have been through things, built things, broken things, fixed things, lost things, and learned the hard way. HVAC R&D gives those stories a place to land.

Another of my Rhino-fueled guilty pleasures is Rhydon's LinkedIn page. Though long, thought-out posts are not everyday content there, I find myself reading every one that does present itself, pondering it and sometimes fighting off an existential crisis because HOW can someone have such great communication? Such a handle on their mind and opinions that it feels like someone reached deep into the industry and dragged out all the things we should all be saying but don't have words for?

All of Rhydon's social media is entertaining, and I recommend you follow, but something about those LinkedIn posts scream "protect at all costs, we will need this guy's ideas someday."



Bringing an incredibly divisive occupation together on all levels—all platforms—is a mighty feat for many, and it's truly admirable to have a glimpse of those brave enough to tackle it, let alone create a whole community of people working together toward the same goal.

As a fellow podcaster, writer, and someone who spends a possibly concerning amount of time floating around this wild online HVAC/R circus, I appreciate people like Rhydon more than I can probably fit into one column. The HVAC/R podcast circuit is not just entertainment. It is not just background noise while someone drives to the next call. It is modern mentorship. It is connection. It is training, therapy, networking, laughter, and industry news all wrapped into one chaotic little audio package.

Every good circuit needs connectors.

Rhydon is one of those connectors. R&D is one of those shows.

To learn more about our trade, the industry, Rhydon or his guests, be sure to follow and subscribe to the HVAC R&D Podcast wherever you like to listen!

In 2018, an idea was brought to life.

An idea that HVAC guys who were passionate about their craft could wear cool gear that represented what they did for a living.

An idea that the brand itself would stand for something more than just a cool looking shirt or hat.

That idea was



It celebrates those who have the desire to learn and have made the conscious decision to strive to be the best at what they do.

Being tactical is a mindset.

It's seeing the end before you even begin.

Calculating, planning, and plotting every step to ensure the success of the team, job or goal.

So keep training, keep learning, and make the decision to be the best.

A grayscale photograph of two men. The man in the foreground is wearing a cowboy hat and a dark hoodie with the 'HVAC TACTICAL' logo. The man in the background is wearing a baseball cap and a dark t-shirt with the same logo. They are both looking off to the side. The image has a faded, artistic feel.

**more than a brand
more than a lifestyle
› it's a mindset**

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