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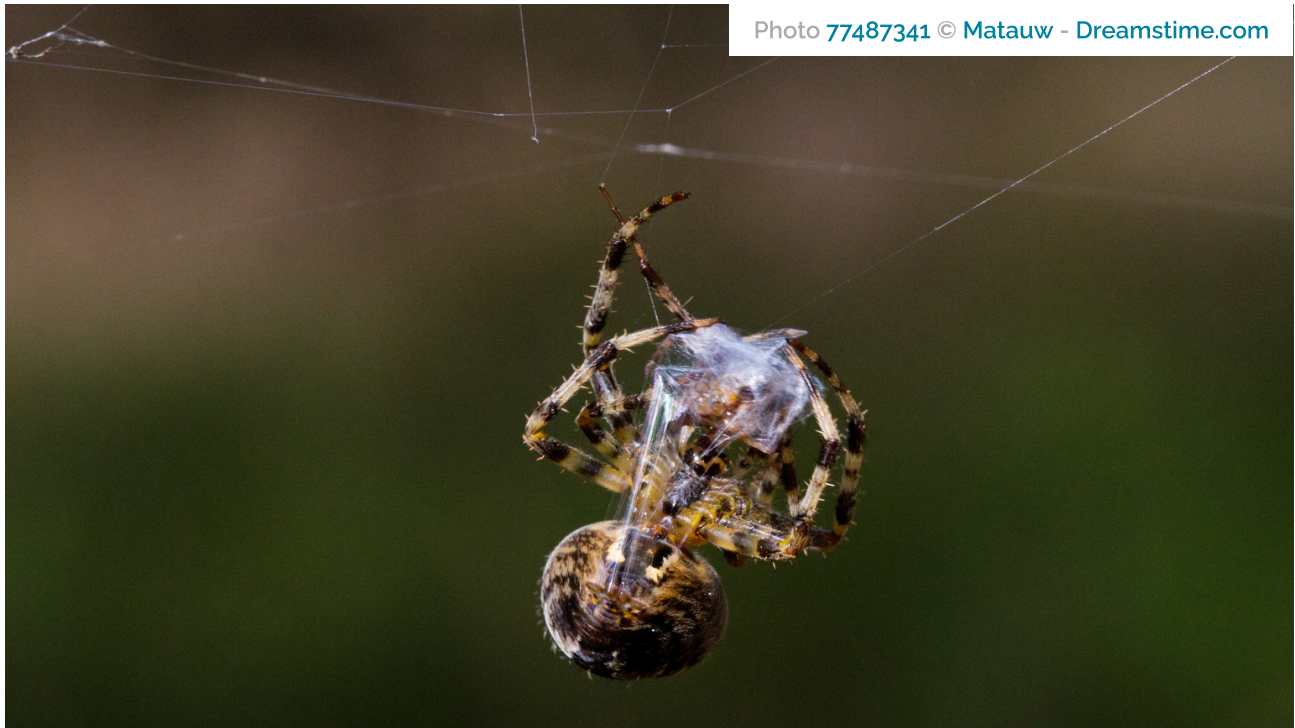


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When Plumbers Eat Their Own

Contractors who attack the trade should be shunned and shouted down by the trade. Plumbers should defend each other.

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Why do some plumbing contractors feel it necessary to publicly rip other companies? Don't they know, that by attacking any one company, they are attacking the entire trade?

A top plumbing contractor was recently the subject of a television hit piece that the media likes to run every so often to boost ratings by destroying small businesses. The plumber did everything right, but that is not how it was portrayed. After all, who

would watch a story with the lead: “Plumber does everything right, but consumer is mad because he is expensive.”

The media sensationalizes to grab eyeballs and generate clicks. They feel safe in distorting small businesses because small businesses lack the resources to fight back. Plus, there is little risk of offending a major advertiser. This is why the media rarely, if ever, targets the big boxes.

Fortunately, these hit pieces have a short shelf life. They tend to evaporate with the news cycle and get buried on the media websites with the rest of the old news. The only lasting legacy is the public memory that plumbers are crooks who cannot be trusted. The entire trade gets painted by the same broad brush.

It gets worse when a plumbing contractor gets on YouTube, plays the hit piece, and offers uninformed commentary. The guy slamming the trade gets to feel self-righteous by offering warnings about others in the trade who are purportedly less reputable. He may think he is positioning himself above his fellow plumbers, but what he is really doing is trashing the entire trade in a way that keeps the damage front and center longer.

If the YouTube self-appointed arbitrator of plumbing honesty was supportive of the trade, he would reach out to the plumbers who are subjects of hit pieces and get their side of what happened. Instead, we are left with a plumber getting ambushed by the media who ask the plumbing equivalent of, “When did you stop beating your wife?” Any answer is edited to play in the worst light possible. The YouTube plumber then piles on and gives the media unwarranted legitimacy.

In an ideal world, contractors who attack the trade should be shunned and shouted down by the trade. Plumbers should defend each other.

But what about the occasional guy who is corrupt? There is more incompetence than corruption in the trades. According to the Department of Commerce, there are nearly 90 thousand plumbing and HVAC companies with payrolls. There are just as many

operating as single truck operators or partnerships without payrolls. That is a lot of companies.

Are there a few bad apples? Probably. They probably are not the larger, more established companies that are targeted by the media and sniped at by other tradesmen. You cannot succeed over time in business without delivering true value to people.

So why do some plumbers eat their own? In a word, it is envy. We live in a society where envy is one of the governing forces. If someone has more than you, it cannot be due to hard work and better decisions. It must be because they cheated or received some unfair privilege.

There is a reason envy is listed as one of the Seven Deadly Sins and why the 10th Commandment warned against coveting your neighbor's possessions. Envy is corrupting. It is the real wellspring of corruption in the trade. Everyone would be far better off if envy was replaced with emulation.

Instead of looking at successful contractors with scorn, look at them as examples to emulate. Ask what they are doing that you could do. Ask why they are successful. Call them and ask them directly.

Few professions are as apt to mentor up and coming contractors as plumbing. The most successful contractors do not fear others. They help them. They give back.

Plumbing is a noble profession. It does not have a deficit of honesty. If it has any deficit, it is professionalism. Professionals do not trash the trade. They do not trash other contractors. They help them. They give back. They build the industry up.

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