

## Top 8 ½ Secrets for Selecting the Right Contractor for your Home Remodeling Project

Selecting the right contractor for your job can be a real hassle. That's why we have taken the time to put together a list of industry secrets that will assist you in making the right choice. These are a series of questions in which you can ask your prospective contractors; to help you weed through the ones that are truly worth your time and hard earned money – the one contractor that you can trust to deliver the project to you, on time, on budget, and most importantly to your complete satisfaction, while exceeding all of your expectations of what your finished project should look like.

Ask around, friends, family, neighbors, anyone with any experience in dealing with contractors will tell you, finding the right contractor can be a real challenge. It is not always the contractor with the lowest price or the flashiest sales presentations. There must be the ability for you to communicate and feel comfortable with your chosen contractor and get answers to your questions, before, during and after the project. These required “ingredients”, are what we like to call the “recipe” to a successful client/contractor relationship. This is what inevitably will determine if the demands for your project will be met to your complete satisfaction!

- 1. Is the contractor licensed?** Does this contractor have a valid license to perform work in my area? Does the salesman that comes to my door have the required credentials and the proper salesman license to transact business on the behalf of the company? Ask to see his/her ID card when they visit your home. You can also verify these items via the Maryland Home Improvement Commission at 410-230-6309 or on the web at [www.dllr.state.md.us](http://www.dllr.state.md.us) . Please keep in mind that just because a contractor is licensed, it is not an endorsement of his ability to perform quality work, it only provides some financial protection to you the homeowner on behalf of the issuing licensing board.
- 2. Does the contractor have Insurance?** The contractor must have the proper insurance in place to perform work on your home. Ask for a copy of their insurance certificate that shows they carry general liability and workman's compensation coverage. You can obtain the name and telephone number of their insurance agent and then request that you are provided a certificate of insurance *prior* to the work starting. It can be risky accepting copies of insurance certificates from the contractor himself – verifying with the agent is your best proof of validity.
- 3. Does the contractor have local recent references?** Any decent contractor should have a track record for past performance. They should be happy to share them with you. Local references are a good source to check on the contractors' performance, to see their work and speak with the homeowners and inquire about their level of satisfaction with the completed project. Did they start on time? Did they show up on time? Did they communicate any problems, return phone calls,

were they available to address any of the homeowner's concerns that came up while completing the job?

- 4. Credentials, awards, and associations:** Does the contractor have the proper credentials to install the products he is recommending? Manufacturers have on-going training programs and product knowledge tests that are essential, to stay on top of the fast changing pace of products and installation techniques. Have they been recognized in their industry by their peers for their quality of work? Does the contractor participate in the various trade associations that are available to the trade market? A membership in NRCA, NARI or various other trade associations, demonstrates the contractor's willingness to be involved and have a genuine interest for the betterment of his industry.
  
- 5. What should be included in my contractor's proposal?** The most important item of any contract is the clear and specified terms of the contract. The executed contract should be, dated for when it was written, on company letterhead with a, fixed address, phone numbers and license numbers. It should clearly specify; the name and phone numbers of who is authorizing the work, the address where the work is to be performed, the description of work to be performed, clearly specify the materials to be used, have an anticipated start and finish date, provide a provision for payment schedule, and if there is a need for work permits; who is responsible for filing and obtaining them, paying for them and securing "final" inspection. Finally the contract should have a written material and labor warranty.
  
- 6. What about my contractor's place of business?** Does the contractor have a fixed address, with office space, office staff, a showroom, a warehouse and a permanently established business? Industry research shows that the longer the contractor has been around, at a fixed address, the more likely he is going to be there to perform the work to your satisfaction, and provide the future service you expect; and that will ultimately provide him the referrals he needs for his business to endure the future.
  
- 7. How can one contractor's price be so much different from another?** Here you are, you have gotten your estimates and all the proposals are on you table lined up side by side, and every one of them has a different price, some low, some high, different products and materials, some well known for their quality and some you have never heard of, and probably one proposal where the materials and products are not even specified! How can that happen? Well what is exactly included the price of your project? There is the labor to install the products, there is the cost of the products, there is the overhead to allow the company to perform as efficiently as possible, and there is the profit, so that the company can sustain a reasonable amount of growth, and weather the storm of natural peaks and valleys of the industry. If one contractor is using inferior products, un-trained and uninsured labor, working out the back of an old pickup truck, not pulling the proper permits and the other contractor has a fixed place of business, using quality

products, trained labor and securing the proper permits, while going through the required maze and channels that is part of a quality remodeling project, it stands to reason the price for each proposal is going to be considerably different. Be careful when making your selection based solely on price, the contractor who says he can get to your project right away and is the lowest price of the bunch, can only get to your project quickly with that low price for a number of reasons. He is not very busy. Ask yourself why is he not very busy? A quality contractor will always have plenty of work. There is always going to be a demand for the quality-minded well-trained labor contractor. It is for this reason that the low-ball contractor can charge less for his work. He is not paying a premium for skilled labor and he is not selecting top-notch products to install your work. Think for a moment... if the quality contractor has been in business longer, than his price must be the right price to be around so long, and he must be selecting and installing the right quality products to continue to get referrals. Because let's face it, there are not too many news sources that are any more juicier, than the one that goes through the "neighborhood rumor mill", you know the one, about how this and that jack-leg fly-by-night contractors have ripped off one of the neighbors!

**8. What happens after the work begins?** This is the most important time of your project because now you get to see the guys in action and now you are either going to get that warm and fuzzy feeling that you have made the right choice, or you are going to get the feeling in your stomach that just won't go away – that feeling that says there is something wrong here – but I am just not quite sure what it is? This is where the communication skills of the crew and project manager come into play. Project manager – what is that? This is your point man, your go-to-man, the one rep that you should feel the most comfortable in dealing with that can answer any questions, address any concerns, and act as a liaison between (you) the homeowner and the crew. Ideally this same person is the same person that sold you the job – it stands to reason he is the one that is the most familiar with your project and all the details, nuances that there are about it. You should be able to reach this person – do not be afraid to ask for their cell phone number or at the bare minimum a daytime contact number to iron out and work through any issues or problems that come up during your project.

**1/2. If the deal sounds too good to be true – it probably is** Be careful of the one contractor that says yes to everything while getting you to sign his lowest price – deal of the century - proposal. Use what for most people is the most important part of our body in making a decision – your lower half – your gut!

For more information on how to select the right contractor please call us at 301-948-0100 for a FREE no obligation telephone consultation to discuss your remodeling needs. We are celebrating our 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our family business – go ahead put us to the test – watch us shine! Remember as our Pop used to say – “just provide a quality product at a competitive price, and you will have a business that you can be proud of and one that you can pass on to your children as well”.