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How to Choose Your Remodeling Contractor

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As anyone who has any experience working with a Home Remodeling Contractor will tell you, finding the RIGHT contractor for your project is never as simple as just finding the lowest price. Less tangible items like your ability to communicate and feel comfortable working with your contractor will inevitably be much more important in determining your eventual satisfaction with the job – particularly if it's a large project.

Ask Your Friends and Family

More often than not, we have someone close to us who has remodeled his or her home in the past. Ask around to your friends and family to see if they have any recommendations for a Remodeling Contractor they had a positive experience with.

You can also start your search with local building associations, like the Building Industry Association of Lancaster, the National Association of Home Builders and the Better Business Bureau for accredited contractors in your area. You also want to make sure the contractor specializes in Home Remodeling and not Home Building. While they sound similar, they are very different.

After you get a few names, you can usually find their website online to do a little beginning research.

Get Several Specific Written Estimates

Different contractors can vary widely on pricing and level of detail even when bidding for the same job. Make sure and get several estimates (at least 2 or 3), especially if it's a big project. As much as possible, make sure that you explain the job fully to each of the contractors to ensure each one bids on the same exact job so that you can compare the estimates more effectively. You may consider brainstorming or jotting down your own ideas for the project ahead of time so you are prepared. You also want to make sure they guarantee their estimate. You don't want to find out after that fact you owe the contractor A LOT more than you were told!

Can They Provide References?

A true professional Remodeler should be able to provide you with a few references of homeowners they have worked with. Talk with these past clients of your prospective contractors'. Some good questions to ask are: Were they satisfied with the work? Was the job site kept clean?

Did the contractor keep to the agreed-upon schedule? Did the contractor return their phone calls and/or emails?

DO NOT Automatically Accept the Lowest Bid

The old saying “you get what you pay for” applies here. A higher bid may be worth the price in better materials, workmanship and reliability. A large number of complaints filed against contractors are the result of a homeowner taking the lowest bid and then being unhappy with the low quality of work. Even when the contractor promises to do the same job, be careful – often contractors will bid a job extremely aggressively in order to get it. If the work takes longer than originally planned, the contractor can feel ‘squeezed’ by the budget and try and cut corners. What you ‘save’ up front could easily cost you when they don’t guarantee the estimate and charge you much more than promised. It could also actually DECREASE the value of your home because of unprofessional work.

Is Your Contractor Properly Registered?

Please note: A Contractors’ Registration is not an endorsement of the quality of their work. It does however provide you with some financial protection as the customer. As of July 1st, 2009 Contractor Registration is required in the state of Pennsylvania. Their registration number should be on all paperwork they show you. You can verify any contractors’ registration with the Attorney General.

Is Your Contractor Properly Insured?

Always ask your contractor for a copy of his proof of liability insurance and workman’s comp insurance or the name and number of his/her insurance agent to call and verify proof of coverage. A short phone call can save you hours and hours down the road, as well as A LOT of money.

Most Importantly... Do You Trust This Person?

When it comes down to it, the most important thing to check is your own instincts. How do you feel about this contractor working on what is probably your single largest investment – your home? Do you trust this person inside your home? Around your children? Can you communicate well with this person about the project? Are they ‘in tune’ to your needs? Are they an expert and experienced in the type of project your looking to get done?

I hope you found this information useful. Choosing the right contractor for your project is the most important step to guaranteeing your satisfaction, and will make all the difference in the long term. If you have any questions, feel free to email me at Mike@MBCremodeling.com.