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6 Secrets to Successful Remodeling

Important Information to Know Before
Starting Your Home Remodeling Project

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Dear Friend

Here is the free report you recently requested, detailing:
Six Secrets To Successful Remodeling

Remodeling your home is a major financial, emotional and time investment. That's why thoroughly researching your options and starting your remodeling project with a good idea of what to expect, and which questions to ask, is so important. All of us have heard tales of remodeling projects gone awry. Whether it was hiring the wrong contractor, permit battles with the city, or arguments with a neighbor, no homeowner wants to be stuck dealing with headaches above and beyond the anticipated inconveniences of a normal remodeling project.

That being said, you likely already know that you should do some research before deciding on a company to handle your remodel. But, most of us are just too busy these days to take the time to compile all the information necessary to make an informed decision. That's where this book comes in – inside, you'll find the six things I've found to be critical to the execution of a successful remodeling project. I'll cover the questions to ask a potential contractor, how to tell if a project will run smoothly and how to avoid some common home remodeling pitfalls, among others.

Bill Simone, CGR, CAPS
President, CD&C





Secret #1 – Avoid Common Misconceptions

1. If the Better Business Bureau doesn't have any complaints against the contractor, he must be qualified.

This is a common and often costly misconception. Just because a contractor doesn't have any complaints with the BBB, does not mean you're working with someone who is a reputable professional. Many contractors, though they have no BBB complaints, do not do a satisfactory job (much less a superior job). To ensure you're dealing with a reputable professional, use the BBB as a starting place, not the only place. Also keep in mind, the BBB is not a government agency and it does not keep a record on every contractor in town. There are several very reputable contractors the BBB has no record of at all. To truly gain perspective of a contractor's credibility, research beyond the BBB.

2. Going with the lowest estimate saves you money.

Everyone tends to look for the lowest price, but when it comes to remodeling, ask yourself what is being left out or what shortcut is being taken. For example, one roofer quoted his re-roof job \$2,300 cheaper than anyone else. The homeowner wanted to save some money and accepted his proposal. After the job was completed, all the old shingles and nails were left lying around the yard. When the homeowner called to complain, the roofer told him that he had not figured the cleanup in his proposal and that was why he could do the job so much cheaper than anyone else could.

One of the most common signs of trouble ahead is someone offering to do work for much less than his or her competitors. Like anything else, you can't get something for nothing. Be wary when choosing your contractor based on the lowest price.





3. Doing it yourself saves money.

Sometimes the “weekend warrior” can undertake small projects like painting, hanging wallpaper, routine repairs, etc. But beware of undertaking larger, more complicated projects. What starts out as an attempt to save money can turn into a costly mess. All too often, a job becomes overwhelming and ends up costing more to have a reputable professional come in and fix what’s been done. Despite what you see on home improvement television shows, less than 20% of these do-it-yourself jobs work out to the homeowner’s satisfaction, according to a recent newspaper article. If you want to be assured your project will turn out the way you want it, call a reputable professional.

4. If a person claims to have many years of experience, they must do quality work.

Again, this is not necessarily the case. I can’t tell you how many people receive bad workmanship from contractors who claimed to have been in business, or the trade, for twenty years. Take experience claims with a grain of salt. Just because a contractor claims to have twenty years experience, does not necessarily mean you’ll get what you want. After all, he or she could have done a poor job for twenty years. Investigate further to ensure you’re dealing with a qualified professional.





Secret #2 – Avoid Common Scams

1. Today only discounts.

If a contractor ever tells you the price is available for “today only,” it’s time to show him the door. In this common scam, contractors will say that by signing today you’re entitled to a “model home discount.” The story centers on using your home as a “model” to advertise the contractor’s services in the neighborhood. In reality, they mark their prices up to give you a false discount.

2. Avoid high-pressure salespeople.

Along the same lines, you should never feel pressured into making a decision about choosing your contractor. If you ever feel that a contractor or salesperson is pressuring you, politely but firmly ask them to back off. If they persist, it’s time to look for another contractor. High pressure tactics can lead to a bad decision when remodeling. A qualified, reputable professional wants you to feel comfortable and confident in your decision to use their services, not forced into doing so.

3. Beware of “Door-To-Door” contractors.

The thing about door-to-door contractors is, they may not be contractors at all. Never allow a contractor into your home until you have had a chance to research them thoroughly.

Despite appearing legitimate, it was recently reported that two men claiming to be contractors entered a home and while one took the homeowner on a pretend inspection, the other was going through purses and picking up items that could be sold quickly. Although this example may not be typical, contractors should be thoroughly researched before being invited into your home.

On occasion, contractors working in your area may put out flyers or come to your door soliciting additional work. These contractors could be honest, reputable people. But you should not invite them in. Instead, politely ask them for their business card and the name, address, and telephone number of the people they are doing work for in the neighborhood. Then make an appointment with that homeowner to take a look at the quality of their work.



Secret #3 – Ask The Right Questions

1. Are You Licensed?

Make sure your contractor is properly licensed. In the State of California, all contractors must be licensed. Of course, anyone can claim that they are, so ask any potential contractor to prove it by either showing you the license or giving you a copy. Also remember to check the expiration date. You can also independently check this online at www.CSLB.ca.gov. Besides raising other questions and concerns about a contractor, not being licensed is against the law. If a contractor can not produce a valid license, do not hire him. Many contractors' licenses permit them to do a specific type of work. Check their license and be sure to hire a specialty contractor (trim carpentry, drywall, glazing, aluminum, plumbing, electrical, mechanical, roofing, etc.) to do only the type of work the license specifies. If your project involves multiple trades people, carpentry, plumbing, electrical, etc. you need to have a contractor with a "B" general building license. If you have any questions or doubts, call the California Department of Consumer Affairs, or the Contractors State License Board at 1-800-321- CSLB and follow their instructions.

2. Do you carry workers' compensation & liability insurance?

Make sure your contractor carries workers' compensation and liability insurance. It protects you from liability if a worker is injured while on your property. Be aware that if the contractor doesn't carry workers' compensation and liability coverage, you may be liable for any injuries suffered by the contractor or any of his employees on the job site. If the contractor is a one-man operation, he can be exempt from having to carry workers' compensation insurance. If he is doing so legally, he can provide you with a copy of his Construction Industry Certificate of Exemption from Workers' Compensation. Despite being legal, this route can be risky. If the contractor shows up with a helper and the helper gets hurt, with no workers' compensation insurance, you may be held responsible for the medical bills. If the uninsured contractor is sloppy about verifying his sub-contractor's workers' compensation insurance and the sub-contractor gets hurt, you may have to pay the medical bills. In short, it's much safer to deal with a fully insured contractor.



3. Will you provide me with a written lien waiver?

Your contractor should provide you with a written lien waiver at the end of the job. This is a legal document which says you the homeowner have paid the contractor in full for the services rendered and the contractor waives his right to place a mechanic's lien on your property. If during the course of construction you receive any Preliminary Lien Notices from material suppliers or subcontractors, it would be prudent to ask the contractor for a Final Release of Lien from each one prior to paying the contractor his final draw. This protects you in case the contractor doesn't pay his material suppliers or sub-contractors after you have paid him in full.

4. Will you pull all the required building permits?

Make sure your contractor pulls all required permits. This is very important. When a contractor pulls the required building permits, you know things will be done to "code." Also, many homeowners' insurance policies require pulling a permit on any major remodeling to keep your home properly covered. Although this seems like it should be a given, not all contractors will do this. Many prefer not to pull permits because of the time involved and the "hassle" of inspectors. Some contractors may ask you to get their permits. This could be a warning sign that they are not able to pull the permit because they are unlicensed, or the work is outside of their license. A reputable contractor will permit every job where a permit is required.

5. Do you guarantee your work?

Your contractor should guarantee his work for at least one year from date of completion. Some contractors guarantee their work for two or even three years.

6. Who will be in charge of the job?

Make sure the contractor or his foreman is on the job whenever work is being performed – especially if sub-contractors will be used. The responsible party must be intimately familiar with every aspect of your project. If you won't be home during the construction and must leave the house unlocked, or leave a key with the contractor, you must feel comfortable.

7. Will you provide me with references?

A good contractor will be happy to provide you with references. You should look for a well-established contractor who can give you several client references from the last 6 months to one year. Ask for the name of the contractor's accountant or banker. You want to ensure the contractor is financially sound and won't be declaring bankruptcy in the middle of your project.



8. What percentage of your business is repeat or referral business?

When a significant source of a contractor's business is derived from repeat and referral business, it usually indicates that his clients are pleased with the work they've received.

9. How many projects like mine have you completed in the last year?

Your contractor should have experience with the type of remodeling project you want done – not just “contracting experience.” After all, you don't want to be his experiment!

10. How do you handle “dirty work”?

Construction is dusty and dirty! It gets everywhere, especially if any sanding is being done. Make sure the contractor will make an honest effort to keep the dust contained, or notify you when the heavy dust generating operations will take place so you can place sheets over furniture or move sensitive belongings. Also ask the contractor to sweep up and place all construction debris in a predetermined place at the end of every day.





Secret #4 – Ask The Right People

1. Ask for qualified opinions.

It never ceases to amaze me how many people take advice on their construction and remodeling project from people who are totally unqualified to give this critical advice. Quite often, when I see construction messes and ask where they got the idea to do this or that, I inevitably hear things like:

My brother-in-law told me to do that. He used to do work like this on the side when he was a student. I asked the guy in the office next to mine. He did the same thing to his home when he lived in Wisconsin. I read an article by so-and-so that said we should...

Everyone's got an opinion on what you should do with your remodeling dollars. Just because someone is your relative, friend, or thinks they know construction, doesn't mean they know the answers to your remodeling questions or problems. Take advice from these sources with a grain of salt.

2. Call at least three of the references you're given.

Many people start out on the right track by asking for references but then never follow up. To the point above, if you're looking for a qualified opinion, be sure to take a few minutes to talk to these people. Most will be pleased to accept your calls. Ask if the job was done on time and at the agreed upon price. Ask if the contractor was easy to reach and easy to deal with.

3. Visit the references and see examples of work.

You can learn a lot by seeing the finished product. If the contractor is good, many previous clients are extremely proud of their "new" home and will be glad to let you look.

Ask to see a job in progress. Is the job site clean? Or are tools and materials strewn about like a hurricane just blew through? Is everything dusty and dirty, or is it covered or sealed off? Chances are if a contractor keeps his work sites clean and neat, especially at the end of the day when it's time to go home, you've got a conscientious contractor.



Secret #5 – Take Notes and Make Observations

1. Good communication

If you can comfortably talk with your contractor, you can work out any details that come up. Take notes on his behavior to see what working together could be like if you commit to doing a project together.

- When you leave a message, does he return your call?
- Does he return your text or email promptly?
- Does he listen to you?

Nothing is more important than feeling like your contractor understands your needs and concerns. If your contractor is so busy that he can't return your calls or text messages promptly, maybe it's time to look for a new contractor. When you're in a discussion, does the contractor really listen to you? Good communication is vital for a successful project. You should always feel like the both of you are on the same page. This can avoid miscommunication and costly errors. This is a very important "secret" to a successful and enjoyable remodeling experience. Choose someone who will listen to you.

2. Comfort

If you feel comfortable with your contractor, the chances are good your project will run smoothly. Remodeling your home is a major financial, emotional and time investment, and it's likely you'll end up spending a good amount of time with your contractor.

Do you find this person nice? Considerate? Personable? A good listener? Was he polite and courteous? Or did he make you feel that he wasn't interested? You will be working with this person for a matter of days, weeks or months depending upon the project you need completed – it's important to like the person you're working with.

3. Trust

If you feel your contractor is trustworthy, the likelihood of a successful project is good. Check his references. Keep in mind that if your project will entail entrance into your home and if you won't be home during the day, the keys to your castle will be given to your contractor.

4. Completion

Does your contractor give you a reasonable estimate for how long the project will take to complete? A good contractor will do this. Remember, you're looking for a contractor to complete your job in a professional and efficient manner, not move in with you forever! Nothing is more frustrating and irritating than a remodel job that runs way behind schedule.



5. Written Proposal

If a potential contractor looks at a complex job, picks a price out of thin air and scribbles the figure on the back of their business card as their “estimate,” show him the door! You want a detailed written proposal that shows what is included: exact materials, brand names (where important), costs, and the payment schedule.

Work out the little details before work begins, for example:

- Where will the dumpster go?
- What time of day will construction begin and end?
- Will work take place on weekends?
- Will workmen refrain from smoking inside the house?

6. Flexibility

Remodeling is an interruption to your normal lifestyle. If your project involves the kitchen, plan on eating a few extra meals out with the kids (or better yet, send the kids to relatives and go out alone!) Remodeling time may not be the best time to host a slumber party for your eight-year-old daughter.

7. Appearance

You can't judge a book by its cover, but if your contractor has a neat appearance, this is a good sign of things to come. Of course you wouldn't expect him to show up in a coat and tie, but neatness does count, and can be a reflection of his work habits and style.

8. Down payment

If the contractor asks for a large payment up front, this could be a tip-off that they are not in good financial standing and you could be in for a rocky experience. A fair down payment should not exceed 10% or \$1,000.00 (whichever is less). As the work progresses, you should expect to pay out additional funds to match the prescribed, completed stages.

9. Change Orders

With remodeling, there is always the chance that you may want or need to change a material or contract item. Ask how these are handled. They should be written on a separate document showing in detail what is being changed and how much it will cost. This should be done before the change is affected and signed by both the contractor and homeowner.



Secret #6 – Plan Your Project

Now for the final, and most fun, step - plan your project with a qualified remodeling expert!

Most people spend more time planning a one-week vacation than they do a major remodel of their home. If you're considering a remodel in the near future, sitting down and talking with a professional remodeling expert who can answer all of your questions is the best advice I can give.

At Custom Design & Construction we pride ourselves on the unparalleled service and personal attention of our staff, as well as our Design-Build philosophy, which encompasses every aspect of a home remodeling project.

We combine architecture, engineering, interior design, project management and financing into a coherent whole. Because we design what we build and build what we design, Custom Design & Construction delivers unsurpassed value, job after job, time after time.

Some of the remodeling services Custom Design & Construction provides are:

- Kitchen Remodeling
- Bathroom Remodeling
- Additions
- Whole House Remodeling
- In-House Project Financing

We take ownership of every detail of the project, from orchestrating dozens of specialty trades people to dealing with zoning issues. In decades of years in business, we've faced just about every possible home remodeling challenge. This experience allows us to assure a seamless integration of planning and execution.



The Custom Design & Construction's Design Build Process

Gone are the days where you're a liaison between separate design and general contractor teams. Our process, refined over three decades, saves you time, headaches, and money by providing both design and build services from the beginning of your project. Our process consists of five steps:

1. Dream of possibilities.

In this stage, one of our specialists will meet you at your home to understand your vision. We'll get an understanding of your style, current design challenges, clarify building and zone requirements, and we'll also discuss construction planning, budgeting, and timeline.

2. Conceptualize your perfect space.

We'll measure and photograph every inch of your space to ensure complete accuracy while also noting structural elements that might affect construction. Utilizing a perfectly scaled computer plan of your home, we'll then get to work by designing three different design concepts for your consideration, complete with floor plans, elevations, and 3D sketches.





The Custom Design & Construction's Design Build Process *(cont'd)*

3. Refine your preferred design concept.

Spend time with our team at our design center in El Segunda, CA, where we'll guide you to make well-informed decisions about your home – including exterior and interior finishes, cabinetry, tiles, and countertops. Your project manager will begin scheduling trade experts, such as plumbers and electricians, to ensure your home is in an optimal state to begin the construction phase.

4. Product & Finish Materials Selections

Before your renovation begins, you'll have complete transparency into the site plan – workflow, working hours, and the location of tools, equipment, and materials. When the project is near completion, we'll meet for a final project review to answer any questions and communicate our plan to finish outstanding details.

5. The One-Step Finance Solution

While we'll be sad to wave goodbye, the Custom Design & Construction team will be a phone call away if you ever have any questions – or want to tackle another project together.





We look forward to
working with you.

(310) 815-4815

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