

Doing Everyone Else's Job

Having worked on literally hundreds of residential remodels over the past 15 years, I have had clients from every walk of life. Many of the people who hire me to help them with their plans for remodeling their home are highly skilled professionals, or people who run their own businesses. Sometimes, the decision making and "take charge" abilities that make people successful contribute toward problems in remodeling projects. Let's touch on a few of the problems I have seen in the hopes that it might help you avoid some problems of your own.

"I Can Do Anything you can do better"

Much of what happens on a construction site appears to not involve a great degree of precision and skill. I'm sure that doubly true when the remodeling site is viewed by a highly trained professional, such as a brain surgeon or a criminal attorney. They might watch a tile setter, for example, as he repeatedly goes through this routine: meticulously picking up each piece of tile, marking it for size and fit, walking a few steps to where the diamond saw is set up; cutting it much more slowly than the high powered equipment is capable of; checking the fit again, laboriously coating the tile with setting mud, carefully placing it and tapping it with the butt end of a trowel. Then the entire process starts again, moving methodically along at what seems like a snail's pace.

In analyzing the process, our observer might see many steps that appear could be easily eliminated, or at the least greatly sped up. They might even decide to eliminate the tile setter altogether on the assumption that, with their increased care, precision and problem solving ability, they could do a far better job anyway.

In fact, the parts of a trade person's job that require skill and experience are not all

obvious and can be easily overlooked. Sure, it is possible that a few of the steps that they might go through could be eliminated. It is also possible that those steps are there because once absent, they have been found over time to minimize or eliminate things going wrong. There is no way to know which steps are an extra time waster and which steps are important, except by trial and error. Many trades people have spent years on their own trial and error searches, and in their learning the trade they acquired information on the trial and error processes of the tile setters that came before them.

In the face of the uncertainty about what is important, and what's not, don't butt in. Bite your tongue and resist the urge to tell the craftsman about your ideas on how to do their jobs better. If you just can't resist, you'll likely find that your 'helpful criticisms' get a chilly reception at best. At worst, the craftsman will do exactly what you say while muttering under their breath, "I told you so!" Whenever I've seen that happen, the probability of things going awry is magnified ten fold. Sometimes the problems won't show for years. Examples include cracks in tile, changes in the color of the grout, and unevenness in the surface that poses an irritation or hazard later.

If you are dead convinced that you can do it better yourself, a better choice is to do it yourself. Bear in mind, though, that it is going to take you longer than someone with experience. So, budget adequate time, and you'd better value your time at less than what you are willing to pay the craftsman per hour because there will be more hours involved. Also, don't forget to be realistic about your expectations. You will make mistakes. After all, you are going to be learning on the job.

Fortunately for your ego, in the end you will undoubtedly find that you are a lot easier on yourself when it comes to that final punchlist

than you would have been on a journeyman.
After all, you'll think, they do this all the time.
That is what will explain the quizzical look
your neighbors will have as you are proudly
explaining what you accomplished in your
new project, as you wave your arms
expressively over the tile job that to the
uninitiated looks like, well, like the
homeowner did it.

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