

Doing Everyone Else's Job Part Two

Sometimes the best of intentions can create problems on a remodeling project. In my last column, I gave an example of situations where a smart, highly skilled professional dives into the work that appears so simple, only to find out there's more to it than meets the eye. Fortunately for all our egos, when we 'do it ourselves', our expectations tend to be obscured by a rosy haze of pride and rationalization. Sometimes, the decision making and "take charge" abilities that make people successful contribute toward other problems. Let's touch on a few other examples in the hopes that it might help you avoid these common missteps yourself.

The Three Steps Forward, One Step Back Dance.

In every remodeling project there is what one builder friend calls *remodeling the remodel*. In other words, moving sideways, or backwards in the project process to fix the mistakes. In every project, there are missteps, miss-communication, and just plain screwups. In fact, these glitches actually tend to happen often enough that a sort of rhythm gets going. It becomes much like a dance: three steps forward, one step back... three steps forward, one step back... three steps forward, one step back.

In some lines of work, such as law and medicine and engineering, the very notion of such a pattern is inconceivable. Let's hypothesize a Mr. Sharp, who is comfortably able to deal with minute details and has a naturally take charge attitude - both qualities essential to success every day at work. It's too easy for our Mr. Sharp to scrutinize the work every day, and react with horror to the mistakes he invariably finds. Later, of course, most of these 'mistakes' turn out to be actually just jobs that are only partially finished. In the meantime, Mr. Sharp's blood pressure and moods have been on wild swings. As he is

grimly pacing the job site, making detailed corrective notes, there is the sound of muttering about incompetence or worse. He thinks he is correcting the "inefficient and patently absurd" *three steps forward, one step back* process he has observed. He becomes convinced that without his detailed and continued oversight, the job would quickly deteriorate into a maelstrom of confusion and horrendous mistakes. As he assumes more and more of the contractor's supervisory responsibility, he in effect starts to train everyone else on the job to back off and let him do the detailed management. Taken to an extreme conclusion, ironically Mr. Sharp's management and lack of understanding of the nature of remodeling will lead to cost overruns, confusion and extremely high frustration levels.

Please don't misunderstand. I am *not* saying that you shouldn't speak up when you see mistakes made. Rather, it is counter-productive to assume that you have to do the contractor's job for him or her. If your contractor has successfully completed dozens and dozens of remodeling projects, why all of the sudden would his or her competence have disappeared after getting involved in your project? It's conceivable that it has, but it is rather unlikely.

Showing Up With Your Bus Ticket When The Bus Hasn't Just Already Left, But Is Half Way To Its Destination

Every one of us is trying to pack 26 to 28 hours into the meager 24 hour days we have to work with. Lawyer Sam is working 60 hours a week, and on top of that, has plenty of other activities, such as family life, etc. going on. He has decided at the beginning of the project to delegate responsibility to his wife Jane. He was offered a ticket to get on the bus, but he declined saying, "No, the bus is too slow. I've got more important things to

do." Of course, he would occasionally peek in to see how things were going and to ask general questions such as, "How is it going honey?" to be polite. At first, all goes smoothly. But when things were theoretical, it was easy to be nonchalant and disinterested.

However, now that the project is half-way done, you may find lawyer Sam waving his bus ticket frantically, asserting his right not just to ride the bus, but to be up front with the driver. In fact, why not actually *be* the driver after all? It's his hard earned money, isn't it?

View this scenario the same way you would if you were a passenger on a bus with two people struggling for control of the steering wheel and driver's seat while the bus was traveling 70 miles an hour on a two lane highway with a cliff on the right. Either prepare for a catastrophe, get the intruder out of the face of the bus driver, or bring the bus to a halt immediately until you can sort things out.

I hope this example sounds as incredulous and absurd as it is. Unfortunately, it is also all too common. If you decide at the beginning that you don't have time to drive the bus, or even ride on it, resist the urge later on in the remodeling project to try and take control or second guess decisions that have been made. Without having been involved with the process from the beginning, it is impossible to reconstruct all the whys and wherefores of how things evolved.

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