

## How to Get Quality

"Well," drawled the grizzly contractor, his face twisted into a hint of a sneer, "that's about as good as you're going to get it." I looked up just in time to see my client's eyes open wide and mouth drop in total shock. Thinking fast and to keep the situation from exploding, I yanked the contractor outside for an intense dose of reality counseling. It wasn't easy, but I did get through to him in making my point: *Quality isn't an add alternate or an optional extra. It is the minimum level of acceptable performance.*

Our quest for quality can sometimes be so frustrating that it helps to know that the problem isn't just with us and our own project. In the huge industry that is remodeling, it is pervasive. In 1994, remodeling business exceeded \$120 billion, twice the size of the new home building industry.

A recent survey of some of the 80,000 contractors active in the remodeling industry posed the question: "What are the major trends and issues affecting your business?" The most important issue--as seen by 84% of those polled--was the demand of their customers for quality workmanship. This was second only to demands for quality products by homeowners (cited by 70% of the respondents). These issues far outweighed concerns about price (65%), speed and efficiency (61%), energy efficiency (53%), and competition from do-it-yourselfers (35%). Interestingly, the same survey reported that contractors received the majority of their projects through referrals from satisfied customers (eight times more important than advertising and other methods of securing work).

What can you do to ensure that the material and labor you pay for is of the quality you deserve?

1.*Specify quality.* Make sure your plans and specifications are complete, clear, and

accurate before you start your project.

2.*Budget for quality.* Be prepared to pay more to get the job done right the first time. That's how to make it last and perform over time. Recognize the key difference between something cheap that is inexpensive and something of quality that can be a good bargain even if it's not available at the absolute bottom price.

3.*Put a quality team together.* I once asked a room full of contractors at a seminar I was conducting for all those who didn't do quality work to raise their hands. Guess how many did? I don't think I've ever seen a contractor's card that didn't have the buzz word "quality" on it. However, knowing the buzz words and actually performing are two different things. Seek out those who value quality as much as you do. Check references and past performance because they are the best indicators of the probability that you'll be satisfied.

4.*Plan carefully.* Quality doesn't happen by accident. If you don't have a clear idea of what you're trying to accomplish, it's unlikely anyone else will either. Without a clear plan, it's even less likely that your project will turn out in the way even you expect! Take the time to clarify your specific objectives and decide how you're going to reach them. And don't forget to allow enough time for the work to be done right the first time!

To achieve quality in construction requires patience, thought, and careful execution. Rushing headlong into your project can be a mistake, and in your mad dash for completion, your project's quality will probably suffer. Plan for quality from the very beginning, and you'll be insuring your OWN satisfaction with the final outcome!

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