



How to Hire the Right Building Contractor for your Remodel

Get Recommendations

Start with your friends, neighbors and family and then check in with the National Association of the Remodeling Industry for a list of members in your area.

Do Phone Interviews

Once you've assembled a list, make a quick call to your prospects and ask them the following questions:

1. Do they take on projects of your size/type?
2. Are they licensed, bonded, offer a warranty, belong to the Better Business Bureau?
3. Can they give you a list of previous clients?
4. Ask for photos of completed jobs?
5. How long have they been in business?

The answers to these questions will reveal the company's availability, reliability, how much attention they'll be able to give your project and how smoothly the work will go.

Meet Face to Face

Based on the phone interview, your contractor should arrange to meet for an initial estimate appointment to measure your space and review your needs/wants so that an accurate estimate of cost and time can be made. A contractor should be able to answer your questions satisfactorily and in a manner that puts you at ease. It's crucial that you two communicate well because this person will be in your home for hours at a time. What kind of staff do they have (in house decorator/designer, project manager, building coordinator)? What kind of customer service do they provide and how do they handle sharing information with you about your project? Are they a licensed building contractor with previous experience in your type of remodel/renovation?

Don't Let Price Be Your Guide

Throw out the lowball bid. This contractor is probably cutting corners or may not be including “everything” you want or worse they could just be desperate for work—hardly an encouraging sign in a healthy economy. If the contractor has several projects going on at one time it is a good sign that his business is doing well. Beyond technical competence, comfort should play an equal or greater role in your decision. The single most important factor in choosing a contractor is how well you and your contractor and his team communicates. All things being equal, it's better to spend more and get someone you're confident you can trust and are comfortable with.

Put it in Writing

A good contractor will be able to draw up a contract that details every step of the project and payment schedule; a projected start date and completion date; specific materials and products to be used; and a requirement that the contractor obtain lien releases (for larger jobs) from all subcontractors and suppliers. Having a clear detailed contract isn't about mistrust, it's about insuring a successful renovation.

Don't Mind the Wait! A lot of customers put off researching contractors and getting estimates until they are “ready” to start the job. The problem with this is that the contractor you end up selecting may already be booked with other jobs (always a good indicator). Most busy contractors will book jobs at least 3-6 months in advance, so don't expect to have your job finished by June if you haven't started your research until May.

Finally, remember that as soon as a change or an addition is made or a problem uncovered, the price just increased and the project just got longer. The four most expensive words in the English language? “While you're at it....”