

If You Want the Job Done Right, Hire a Professional Remodeler

Any homeowner planning to remodel wants nothing less than a professional job. Who wouldn't want the best quality in terms of workmanship and materials when it comes to improving their most prized and most valuable asset? However, when it comes to selecting a remodeler, too many buyers conveniently forget the time-proven adage that "you get what you pay for."

The dilemma that confronts many homeowners is their desire for a top-notch job at the lowest possible price. With price as their primary focus, they ignore other criteria that may carry more weight in producing a successfully completed project and a smooth working relationship with the remodeler.

It's understandable that price is a major consideration when it comes to remodeling. The cost of remodeling has increased as the demand for remodeling grows. Higher costs of materials (such as copper pipes) and scarcity of skilled labor are just two factors contributing to price hikes. A national trade magazine, *Remodeling*, reported in a Cost vs. Value survey that a mid-priced major kitchen remodel, the most popular remodeling project, costs \$56,600. For a minor remodel of the same 200-square-foot kitchen, the cost is \$21,250.

Homeowners need to understand that remodeling is a service and not merely a product. This service encompasses the intangibles that make up the process of remodeling – how everything comes together and results in a satisfying experience and an acceptable finished product. The materials and products that go into it can't define a professional job alone.

The nature of remodeling as a service becomes even more pronounced when you consider that inevitably you'll be sharing your home with the remodelers' crews for weeks or even months, depending on the scale of the project. All remodeling involves some degree of inconvenience, but inconvenience can easily turn into a nightmare if your remodeler doesn't put your family's comfort and concerns first.

Rather than selecting a remodeler based on where one bid falls compared to others, shift your focus to finding a professional remodeler; then go about getting a bid on your job. If the bid is higher than what you budgeted, work with the remodeler to decide where you can cut back or what you can postpone to keep the project on budget. For example, you can always have the remodeler frame in a fireplace to be installed later, but he can't upgrade the company's customer service if there wasn't any to begin with.

Some important characteristics you should be looking for to ensure that you hire a professional remodeler are:

- ✓ **Experience** – Ask how long the remodeler has been in business. Longevity suggests financial stability, which is necessary for the remodeler to finish the job and still be available if problems crop up after the job is completed. Also, the more jobs the company has completed, the more expertise the remodeler will bring to your project and the hidden surprises that remodeling typically entails.
- ✓ **Reputation** – Look to the remodelers' former and current customers to gauge the company's reputation. Obtain the names and phone numbers of customers you can call to get their impressions of the company's work and customer service. Call them and make personal visits to see the work they had done. Even better, get references from customers whose projects were similar to the one your family is planning. Also, go visit one of the company's jobs in progress to evaluate how they manage the construction process and how tidy they keep the job site. Ask whether these homeowners would hire the company again.
- ✓ **Business Credentials** - A good place to start your search for a remodeler is with your local builders association and its affiliated local Remodelers Council. Groups like these help to keep their members informed about new products, construction techniques, business practices and industry issues. Participation demonstrates a remodeler's commitment to professionalism and to the remodeling

industry. Many trade groups also confer professional credentials, such as Certified Graduate Remodeler (CGR), to those who meet their requirements, which is a positive indicator of the remodeler's reputation.

- ✓ **License and Insurance** - Ask to see a copy of the remodeler's license, if your state has such requirements, and call the licensing agency to find out if there are any unresolved complaints against the company you might hire. It is also important to verify that the remodeler carries workers' compensation and liability insurance. Have the remodeler show you copies of both insurance certificates to protect yourself from liability in situations involving job site injuries or property damage resulting from the work being done on your home.

If your goal is a professional remodeling project, then your best bet is to hire a professional remodeler. The extra cost will pay for itself in the satisfaction you receive while the project is in progress and during the many years you will enjoy the completed project.