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Ten Action Steps You Must Take Before You Hire A Remodeling Contractor

In the 10 years I have been working with homeowners as well as staff at the Contractors State License Board, it always becomes crystal clear as to why consumers find themselves in trouble with contractors. It's simply the steps that the homeowner should have taken well before looking for a contractor or architect.

It's what I call the "pre-renovation" process which gets you engaged in doing some necessary research with the goal of getting educated, informed and in control of your remodeling or building project. Unfortunately most folks go from thinking "it's time to do some renovation projects" to "let's start looking for a contractor or designer or architect. They've skipped over the most important work, the bridge that would take them to having a successful remodeling project and that's what I teach in my Bootcamp. If you want to avoid a home remodeling nightmare and instead, have a positive experience you cannot skip this process.

The following action steps are part of the process and something you should consider before you begin looking for a contractor.

1. Check to see if your State requires licensing or registration of general contractors and if not, check to see what, if any, is required at the local level. Keep in mind that doing this is simply a necessary formality but it does not give you all the information you need to know about that contractor.
2. Never assume that just because the contractor is licensed or registered in your state that he will abide by state contractors laws, be ethical and perform quality work that meets industry standards. You've got some work to do to be sure he's the right contractor for the job.
3. Thoroughly interview the contractor, asking key questions about job performance, employees or subcontractors and material suppliers he uses, projects he has done similar to yours and how he handles problems when they come up – because they will come up.

4. When interviewing the contractor pay attention to how he answers the questions, is he giving you attitude or coming off "superior" (ego) and if your gut tells you something's not right here, move on. Don't ignore it. I did and paid a price for ignoring my intuition.
5. Verify that the contractor maintains a permanent physical address (go there) and that it is not a PO Box, postal annex suite number, has published phone, cell and some type of messaging system.
6. Verify that the contractor has all the necessary insurance coverage – Surety Bond that is active; Workman's Compensation Insurance if there are employees; and General Liability Insurance by contacting the companies to confirm coverage. You'll get this from him/her at the interview.
7. Do not sign a contract that you do not thoroughly understand, lacks detailed information on the scope of work to be done, including materials, brand names, sizes etc.
8. Get educated about change orders because they're often used during the project. There are unknowns involved in renovating a home and it's a legitimate reason for the contractor to ask for more money if he is to correct the problem and move forward. Insist on having extra work done ONLY if both parties agree upon it and both sign the change order.
9. NEVER, EVER give the contractor a large sum of money up front to begin the project. Every State has specific laws relating to the amount of money the contractor can legally ask for to begin the project and that's your job to find out what that is.
10. Finally, do not hire anyone based on trust alone. Trust is something that is earned. You have no clear idea about this person until you've done your homework, background checks and as a result can see that the individual is competent, ethical and professional.