

## The Price May Be Right, But is the Contractor?

If you needed an organ transplant, heart surgery or any other life changing procedure, would you consider asking three surgeons to submit bids and then go with the lowest one? Of course not. You would demand qualifications as well as a proven track record including abilities, technique and patient history. However, many homeowners think nothing of shelling out tens of thousands of dollars to a remodeler they have selected based solely on price.

Understandably, price is at the top of the list of considerations in choosing a general contractor. And, granted, a remodeling project is not a life-or-death operation, but it could have a definite effect on your family's well being and financial health. A remodeling experience that ends with a poorly constructed project or inflated financial drains on your anticipated budget from underestimated costs and/or re-do's might require a lot of recuperation time!

If price is at the top of your general contractor checklist, move it! Adjust your interview list by re-arranging your priority questions to **reputation**, **references** and **insurance/licensing** documentation. Stay focused on verifying work history, quality of work, and referral client comments. If the track history of your candidates pass the scrutiny of proven ability, professionalism and ethics, then move on to price. If the history isn't there, don't waste your time on cost.

A common approach to the selection process is to solicit bids from three different remodelers. The homeowner typically will throw out the high and low bids and accept the middle one, confident he has minimized his risk by dropping the two extremes. This selection method is driven by price alone. It is shocking to hear that there are still homeowners who do not check the bidding contractors' reputation, references, and/or insurance and licensing documentation. The bidding process involves much more.

One of the first things to check is references. Talk to people who have hired the prospective contractor. Ask about their work ethic of showing up on time, working within the agreed production schedule(s), payment schedules, warranty terms, and overall quality of work. Ask if the contractor (and subcontractors) respected the homeowners' privacy and daily activities as much as possible during the project. And *always* ask, "Would you hire this contractor again?". Some people may be hesitant to make negative comments, but the enthusiasm with which this question is answered will usually tell you everything you need to know.

Another indication of a professional who stands behind his work is the warranty. Check out the warranty terms and conditions. The industry standard warranty term is two years. After talking with the reference, take a look at the completed project. Check the quality of the craftsmanship and materials, overall aesthetics and creativity, and how the project blends in with the rest of the home as well as how long all of the visually completed work is warranted.

One indication of a professional remodeler is membership in a national trade association such as the National Association of the Remodeling Industry (NARI). It is very unlikely that the unskilled, unlicensed, 'bad-job' remodeler will leave a paper trail by joining a professional trade organization. (NARI requires licensure and certification as well as adherence to a strict Code of Ethics.)

Your ultimate decision should be based on your level of comfort and ease of communication with the prospective contractor. The contractor will be spending many hours in your home during the design consultations, preparation, production and completion of your project. Go with your intuitive sense of trust and confidence. Once you have chosen the right contractor for you, you are then ready to consider the issue of price. There is no 'lowest bid' worth the headache and heartache of a bad remodeling experience!