



# EVERYTHING YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT HIRING A PROFESSIONAL REMODELER

The decision to hire a home remodeler can be intimidating. Here we offer you the tools and inside information on finding, evaluating, hiring and working with a remodeler. Your home is your biggest investment, and the best way to protect it is by hiring an ethical, professional remodeler. Let's get started!

## **Find a Professional**

When you hire a remodeler, you are buying a service rather than a product. The quality of the service the remodeler provides will determine the quality of the finished product and your satisfaction.

**Get a List:** The first step to hiring a professional is to build a list of candidates, and flipping through the Yellow Pages is not the ideal method.

## **HOW TO FIND REMODELER CANDIDATES FOR YOUR HOME**

You want to hire a remodeler, but where do you begin? The best place to start is a directory of professional Remodelers. Visit [www.hbrcny.com](http://www.hbrcny.com) for a listing. These home contractors uphold the highest professional and ethical standards in the industry. In addition, seek referrals from:

- Local trade associations, such as your area's local home builders association and local Remodelers™ Council.
- Friends, family, neighbors, coworkers, and others who have had remodeling work done.
- Independent trade contractors, building materials suppliers, architects, engineers, home inspectors, local lenders, and insurance professionals.

Once you have developed a list of potential remodelers – ask questions!

**The Inside Scoop:** Once you have your list of remodelers, how do you properly evaluate their credentials? Ask questions in the following categories~

## **Business Experience and Management**

Does the remodeler:

- Maintain a permanent mailing address, e-mail address, published personal phone number, fax number, and a cell phone, pager, or voice-messaging system? You will want to be able to reach the remodeler quickly and easily, especially at critical times.
- Carry insurance that protects you from claims arising from property damage or jobsite injuries?
- Ask for a copy of the remodeler's insurance certificates so you can be sure you will not be liable in these situations for property damage or jobsite-related injuries.
- Ask the remodeler how much the project will add to your home's value and obtain the necessary additional insurance.
- Have an established presence in the community?
- How long has the company been in business under this name? Longevity suggests financial stability.
- Does the remodeler maintain solid relationships with experienced independent trade contractors such as plumbers and electricians and work with them as a team to keep your job running smoothly?
- Possess a trustworthy reputation among customers, peers, local officials, and people involved in all aspects of the industry?
- Does the remodeler have a track record of successful projects similar to one you are planning?
- Ask for a list of building materials suppliers and call them to see if the remodeler has an account or pays for materials on delivery. Most suppliers are willing to extend credit to financially sound companies.
- Actively participate in a trade organization such as the Remodelers Council of the National Association of Home Builders? This and similar organizations 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 the remodeling industry.
- Has the remodeler earned any professional designations? Through certification programs, these organizations confer designations such as Certified Graduate Remodeler (CGR), Certified Aging in Place Specialist (CAPS), Certified Bath Designer (SBD), or Certified Kitchen Designer (CKD) to those who meet the requirements.
- How long has the remodeler you are considering been a member of these associations?

## **Construction and Technical Expertise**

Does the remodeler:

- Have a working knowledge of the many types and ages of homes in the area. Knowing what is likely to be behind a wall or under a floor helps the remodeler to provide reliable estimates. An extremely low bid may indicate lack of experience and an inability to later cover the actual costs involved in the job and create unnecessary change orders.
- What products and materials would the remodeler be likely to use for your project? Does the remodeler offer an array of options and thus demonstrate knowledge of and experience with a variety of products, materials, and techniques?
- Specialize in particular types of projects?
- Arrange for the building permit? (The person who obtains the permit is the contractor of record and therefore liable for the work).
- Agree to begin and complete your job within a reasonable timetable?

Ask the remodeler for examples of how the company has solved similar space problems for other customers.

### **Customer Service and Communication**

Does the remodeler:

- Respond promptly to your inquiries?
- Schedule meetings and attend them on time?
- Emphasize service and developing a trusting relationship with you?
- Listen to and understand your needs and wants and work with you to ensure that the plans for your job accurately reflect your expectations? When discussing your written priorities, does the remodeler show enthusiasm for your ideas and suggest ways to make them work within your budget?
- Facilitate communication among all parties involved in the project?
- Will the remodeler provide you with schedule updates so you can make appropriate decisions and prepare for any unavoidable inconveniences? Ask how the company handles communications during the construction phase of the job such as a message center in the house for communication between you and the remodeling team, including the designers, architect, and independent trade contractors.

You'll also need to get references from your candidates.

### **Evaluate References:**

You don't want to just question the remodeler, but also learn first hand from the remodeler's current and former customers.

Before you sign a contract, ask the remodeler to share names, phone numbers, and/or e-mail addresses of some customers and take the time to see the remodeler's work.

Ask to see jobs similar to yours. Does the quality of the work meet your standards?

Ask the homeowners:

- Would you hire this company again?
- Did the remodeler maintain a neat jobsite, provide regular broom clean-up, and haul away debris including personal trash?
- Did the remodeler keep labor and materials delays to a minimum so your job could be started and completed on time and reasonably within budget?
- Did you find the remodeler easy to work with? Did the remodeler keep you informed as the job progressed?
- Did the remodeler supply you with paperwork in a timely fashion?
- How well did the remodeler deal with the problems that arose?

### **Make the Decision:**

Now you've done your homework and it's time to choose.

### **FINAL GUIDELINES BEFORE HIRING A REMODELER**

You're almost there, but there are a few final steps before taking the plunge.

Ask yourself if you feel comfortable with the remodeler and confident that this company will do the work according to your plans, budget, and specifications.

If you are satisfied with the answers to your questions, ask for a written estimate of the work to be done based on a set of plans and specifications. Be prepared to pay for this package. If the estimated cost of the project is more than you can afford, see if you can trim something from the project or postpone part of it so you can still work with a professional remodeler.

Ask the remodeler to explain the plans and specifications and company procedures to you. For instance, once construction begins, how does the company handle changes to the initial design, choice of materials, or schedule. If you compare your estimate with another, be sure each one is based upon the same set of plans, specifications, and scope of work. If your remodeler suggests any deviations, ask the remodeler to present them as options separate from the main proposal.

Find out whether the remodeler uses a detailed, written contract that protects both of you and that complies with local, state, and federal laws. The contract must spell out the work that will and will not be performed and provide a fair payment schedule.

Select the remodeler with a track record of a variety of excellent projects and plenty of experience with your type of project.

**Beware of an exceptionally low price. Ask why so much lower than other bids and make sure the answer makes sense to you.**

### **How to Work With a Professional? –**

Since you've done the hard work of evaluating and hiring a professional, the next step is ensuring your home remodel goes smoothly.

**Live with Your Remodel:** The only thing left is the remodeling itself.

Having your home remodeled is uniquely different from having a new home built. With remodeling, your home becomes the worksite. You live side-by-side with the project from start to finish.

Once construction begins, you'll probably long for simple pleasures like a dust-free home or a fully functioning kitchen or bath. But the end result will be well worth these inconveniences. The rest of this section is designed to ensure that you arrive there with your sanity intact.

### **Communicate With Your Remodeler Often**

Consistent and open communication between you and your remodeler will enhance your understanding of the project, provide an opportunity to exchange ideas, and ultimately help to make the experience a positive one for everyone involved.

To facilitate this process, you need to:

Determine who you and your remodeler should contact for daily decisions or an after-hours emergency. For example, your contact may be the lead carpenter for the job, while the remodeler's contact could be your spouse.

- Designate a backup for each contact person to assure continuity in anyone's absence.
- Create a place in your house where the contact persons can leave messages for each other (a securely anchored notebook is a good idea since it is less likely to disappear).
- Speak up. If you are uncertain about any aspect of the project, be sure to let the contact person know.
- One way to ensure the success of your project is to plan for and actively participate in a pre-construction meeting. This allows your remodeler to clarify procedures and explain how the job will progress. It also offers both you and your remodeler an opportunity to prepare for those issues that may arise later. You should think of this meeting as a forum for all participants to define their expectations and agree on the anticipated outcome.
- Some of the issues you may wish to cover at this meeting include:
- Will you allow your remodeler to place a company sign on your property? Remember that, in addition to being a marketing tool, signs help contractors and suppliers locate your home.
- How will workers, construction equipment, and vehicles get to the job site without damaging outside structures, plants, and flower beds?
- What areas of your home will be off limits to workers?
- Do you have a place on site to store building materials for your project?
- Who is responsible for removing your belongings and later returning them to the newly remodeled space? When packing, remember that the workers may need access to the electrical panel, the water shut-off valve, and areas not being remodeled.
- Does your house have an alarm system? Will workers need a key or will someone always be there?
- How will you ensure that your children and pets stay out of the work space?
- Does the space to be remodeled contain any special items that you would like to save from demolition? If so, where should they be stored?
- How will trash removal be handled? Where will the remodeler locate the Dumpster on your property?
- Does the remodeler anticipate any interruptions of utilities during the project? If so, when and for how long? At certain stages of construction, the project may affect basic household necessities like water and electricity. Will you need to vacate the house at any time?
- What are your expectations regarding clean up? Will sweeping be sufficient for a daily cleaning, or will you need a more thorough cleaning in order to use the space?
- You should also use the pre-construction meeting to establish guidelines for the remodeling crew working on the project:
- What times will workers begin and end work at your home? Be sure to consider the neighbors as well as household members. Your remodeler may contact your neighbors and give them a phone number to call if they have any concerns about your project.
- Where can workers park near your job site?
- Will you allow workers to use your phone for local business calls?
- Will bathroom facilities in your home be available to workers?
- What is the remodeler's policy on smoking on the job site?
- What is the remodeler's policy on the use of profanity? If you are especially sensitive to this issue, you should let your remodeler know.
- Will you allow workers to play their radios at a reasonable volume? Are there any stations or programs that you do not want played?

### **Schedule And Time Your Project Carefully**

The time it takes to complete a remodeling project varies quite a bit depending on the scope of the project and uncontrollable factors like the weather. A simple bathroom remodeling may only take a few weeks, while a two-story addition may take six months or more.

To stay on schedule, you need to plan ahead:

Be sure to build time into your schedule for obtaining the necessary permits.

Expect to set aside time for telephone calls and regular meetings with your contact person to review progress and discuss the schedule for remaining work.

**Prevent the Fever:** Now that the project is underway, the disruption can become rather large depending on the scope of the remodel. The best way to prevent this fever is to prepare well, remember that "this too shall pass," and focus on the progress being made. A few other suggestions from remodeling pros:

- Prepare for inconvenience. A remodeling project can turn your home and -- on some days -- your life upside down. A kitchen remodel will, of course, affect meal planning. But a little ingenuity and some culinary shortcuts can lessen the impact. Set up a temporary cooking quarters by moving the refrigerator, toaster oven, and microwave to another room. Arrange a dishwashing station in your laundry room. If the weather is warm, fire up the grill and dine alfresco.
- Designate a safe haven in your home where you can escape from the chaos and commotion.
- Guard against dust. During a remodeling project, dust has the unfortunate tendency to appear everywhere from lampshades to plates stacked inside your kitchen cabinets. To keep out as much dust as possible: 1) Seal off doorways and stairs; 2) Turn off central air or heat when workers are sanding and stock up on extra filters so that you can change them often; 3) Have deliveries made through a designated entrance; 4) Use doormats and temporary floor coverings where appropriate; 5) Remove anything that might get damaged by the dust or at least cover it with plastic drop cloths that are taped shut.
- Maintain a sense of humor. Remember that certain things are out of your control and it's best to laugh rather than upset yourself about things like the weather or delayed delivery of materials.

See the remodeling process as an adventure. Tell the kids that you are "camping in" and transform inconvenience into fun. Along the way, celebrate as different stages of the project are completed. The day the drywall is completed, for instance, could be marked by a nice dinner out!

**Be a Good Neighbor:** A professional remodeler goes out of their way to minimize any inconvenience to your neighbors, but sometimes it doesn't hurt to be neighborly yourself.

## HOMEOWNER REMODELING ETIQUETTE

While remodeling can be an exciting adventure, it's important to remember that neighbors may not be quite as thrilled with the project as you are. While a professional remodeler will help lessen the impact on those living by you, here are some additional tips to help keep the peace in the neighborhood.

- Let neighbors know well in advance about your remodeling plans and keep them apprised of progress, detail by detail. Tell them when work will begin, the approximate completion date, what work will be done and whether workers might have to come onto their property. If delays arise, promptly contact your neighbors to inform them of the revised schedule.
- Make sure noisy power tools are only used during standard business hours. Reasonable hours are 8 a.m. until 5 p.m.
- Inform your neighbors of any large trucks entering the neighborhood and ask subcontractors to park on one side of the street only. Try your best to have materials dropped off in your driveway or yard rather than the street, and keep your yard as tidy as possible. Watch for debris that might find its way onto your neighbors' yards, especially if a roofing project is involved.
- Remove dumpsters as quickly as possible. If you have room left in your last dumpster, invite neighbors to dump anything they might have lurking in their garage that needs tossing.
- If the neighbors are unhappy with an aspect of your project, promptly visit them to apologize. Consider bringing a peace offering such as brownies or muffins. When your project is complete, show your neighbors your appreciation by throwing them a party. You can thank them for their patience and proudly show off your remodeled house.



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