

DreamWork

KITCHENS

Bathrooms & Fine Cabinetry

The Kitchen & Bath Insider[®]

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Choosing a Contractor

Election time is nearing again and we have to start making some tough decisions regarding who we want to represent us for the next few years. Surprisingly, some believe that these decisions are simple compared with selecting a good contractor. However, choosing the right firm for a kitchen or bathroom renovation is not really all that difficult if you follow a few fundamental rules.

Prior to calling prospective contractors, ask people who have done similar work for referrals. Check with professional organizations, (like the National Kitchen and Bath Association), for members in your area. Call the local department of consumer affairs to find out what type of license is required for the work that you're considering and make sure that the company you hire is properly licensed. Also, check to see that they have liability insurance and that their workers are covered by Worker's Compensation and disability insurance. Many small firms and one-man operations can legally waive this insurance, but if they get hurt on your property it becomes your financial responsibility if they are not covered.

If you're unable to obtain any referrals you can look in the Yellow Pages, newspaper ads, or the internet; but don't assume that an advertisement guarantees a trustworthy contractor. It will be necessary to do a little research into a firm that you select through an advertisement.

When you have compiled a "short-list" of contractors to call, leave yourself enough time so that you don't have to rush into a decision. Set up a meeting with the contractors to get estimates and, more importantly, see if you feel comfortable with them. Let common sense, one of your most valuable senses, be your guide. The relationship between you and your contractor is the key to a successful job. If you start with someone who doesn't return calls, shows up late and has no patience for your questions before you hire them, don't expect much more after you've given them a check.

When you've narrowed it down to a couple of choices, its time to check references. Ask the contractor to supply you with the names of people that they have worked for. Of course, just getting the names won't help you much if you don't call them. And, since you're on the phone anyway, call the Better Business Bureau to see if there have been any legitimate complaints lodged against the contractors.

Lastly, *beware of the low bidders*. Every time I've succumbed to the "best price" for a job at my house I've regretted it. As attractive as low bids are, they can be a warning sign that the contractor may be in financial difficulty. He may be desperate to get your deposit in order to pay off bills from a job he has already started. If this is the case he will no doubt run into the same difficulty when he does your job and may have to abandon it due to lack of funds.

Once you have selected a firm, insist on a written contract that specifies exactly what's going to be done at your home. If you have any doubts...put it in writing. The more explicit the contract and work orders are, the less chance of misunderstandings after the work commences. Reputable firms also use "Change Orders" for any deviations to the original contract which require both you and the contractor to sign. Don't be afraid of the paperwork, its purpose is to protect both you and the legitimate contractor.

If you do your homework, and select a reputable contractor, your project will be a successful one. However, even with a great contractor, don't expect that any job will go without some glitches. Anyone who promises a major renovation with no problems at all is not being entirely honest, there are just too many variables. But, when you're dealing with a legitimate contractor any problems that do arise will be dealt with quickly and efficiently, and in the end you will be thankful that you put a little extra effort in selecting them.