

DreamWork

KITCHENS

Bathrooms & Fine Cabinetry

The Kitchen & Bath Insider[®]

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Acting as Your Own GC

My niece and her husband have chosen acting as their profession, and being very talented, they are very successful at it. (Alysia Reiner [niece] won a Screen Actors Guild Award for *Sideways* and David Alan Basche [relation] is in Dreamworks' [no-relation] film, *War of the Worlds*.) Fortunate enough to have residences on both coasts, by having two homes they have twice the remodeling concerns. At a family function the other day, our conversation drifted between their craft and mine. They were considering "acting" as their own General Contractor (GC) so I explained that acting as a GC in the real world is very different than acting on the stage.

This type of project includes almost every craftsman there is, and if the old adage "experience is the best teacher" is accurate, it may be best to leave it to the professional. The primary reason people chose to be their own general contractor is a financial one. When a GC hires the multitude of sub-contractors (subs) necessary for a renovation he will spend his time coordinating their work and will take the ultimate responsibility for their performance and craftsmanship. For this effort the GC is entitled to make a reasonable profit and so adds a percentage of the sub's charges to the total cost. The consumer only has to deal with one person, which makes it easier to discuss concerns and solve problems.

If, however, you are on a tight budget and have time to spare, you can hire the individual workmen and supervise their scheduling and performance yourself. As long as things go smoothly, this can be very rewarding and will result in a financial savings. But if problems arise with any of the subs it may end up costing more in the long run. Certainly in your time and aggravation, but possibly, financially as well.

Suppose you hire a carpenter to install your new cabinets on the 1st, a plumber and electrician on the 2nd, the countertop people on the 3rd, the floor people on the 4th, and the painter on the 5th. It is very possible that this whole schedule could fall apart because the carpenter did not finish his last job and won't be able to start until the 2nd. A one day delay doesn't seem like much, but all of the other workers have their own schedules set up and probably will not be able to switch to your new game plan. They may also charge you for the day that they were supposed to work at your house because now they have no income for that day. If you are setting up your own schedules allow plenty of leeway to avoid a situation like this. Discuss how much time each phase of the renovation will take with each sub and then add a little extra as a precaution.

So, the cabinets are finally in, the plumbing and electrical are underway, and the counter people come to install the granite (a day late, but thank goodness they came at all). They inform you that the cabinets are not level and they cannot install the top. Since they have another appointment, they leave immediately. Now you have to try to get in touch with the carpenter and have him reinstall the base cabinets. You leave a message for him and when he finally returns the call he says "nope, the counter people are wrong, the cabinets are level." It can take days to straighten out a problem like this. To avoid a situation like this, when hiring your subs, try to get them to agree to be on the job site when situations like this may arise.

These are just two possible examples (out of many) of what can go wrong when you're coordinating the efforts of several subs. If you hire a GC any problems that arise become his headache. However, an experienced GC is prepared to deal with these situations and will have contingency plans for each facet of a renovation.

I've worked with many clients who have acted as their own GC. In many cases, it has worked smoothly and in others it was a less than perfect experience. Unless you have some understanding of construction and plenty of time to spare, my suggestion is, if you want to try acting, try the stage and trust the renovation to a professional.