

## **Six Secrets To Successful Construction**

You are about to spend your hard earned money on an important improvement to your home. This reading is somewhat lengthy but I believe you will find it worthwhile.

Believe me, there are many things some contractors would love to keep a mystery. I will discuss some of them in a few minutes.

First, let me ask you two questions:

Has it ever been more frustrating or aggravating trying to decide who you can trust to do your project?

How can you be assured that when you spend your hard earned dollars you will get exactly what you paid for?

If you are frustrated, you're not alone. Haven't we all heard the "nightmare stories" of the botched jobs, scam artists, fly by nighters, unfinished jobs, and a general lack of professionalism.

Let's face it. The bad apples of the industry have really made it hard for the consumer to figure out who the good guys are.

You can't pick up a paper or watch TV without seeing another story about somebody who had a horrible experience, whether it was hiring the wrong contractor, permit battles with the building department, or arguments with a neighbor.

Most of us are too busy to take time to gather all the important information that is necessary when deciding a major expenditure, like how to go about hiring a contractor to do your project.

Is it any wonder why most homeowner make costly mistakes when they're considering their project?

Imagine this experience –

Primarily as a favor to one of my neighbors here in Black Mountain, I built some shelves in their retail store. After the job was completed I gave their adult son a ride home. He showed me work that was begun some years ago on the basement of their home. A contractor had started to finish the basement into living space. The project was very badly done and the contractor never finished. A significant amount of what was done would have to be torn out and started over.

When I first looked at the project I viewed it with dismay and embarrassment. Dismay because I was shocked to find one of my neighbors had been treated so badly. Embarrassment because a trade I take great pride in had done so badly as to give the whole industry a black eye.

What the workers had done is to make it look like it was moving forward very quickly so they could ask for money. My trained eye asked questions the owner could not be expected to know. Why had they started hanging sheet rock when the framing was not completed? Why was there no apparent floor plan to say where the project was going? Why did they install the doors when the framing was not done and the sheetrock was not finished? What was the plan when the partition wall ran into the middle of the electrical panel? All of these panic ways of building said one thing. They never intended to finish the project – They only intended to make it appear like the project was moving quickly and would be done by morning. Can you picture the question – “We should be done in a couple of days can I get a check now?”

To make matters worse, they hired a handyman to try to finish the project. He put on a few band-aids, made a poor attempt, received more money and – you guessed it – never finished the project. Over the years this is not the only instance of abhorrence I have seen.

This is one of the reasons I have assembled this consumer awareness guide. With your help we can put these thieves out of business.

To correct the problem I gave the owner a cost proposal that provided no profit to me while providing professional quality work. My hope was to remove the black eye. They did not accept the proposal. What do you think – Can't trust anybody now, or the scam artist got all the money they had to complete the project? My crystal ball is uncertain – I do know they spent a lot of money and have nothing but heartache to show for it .

Does this story make you sick to your stomach?

I'll bet it does. It really aggravates me when I work so hard to make sure that our clients are more than satisfied and those guys are out there only trying to use an honorable profession to scam people.

When you undertake a construction project, you should be getting that wonderful peace of mind that comes from being in complete control. You should be working with someone who understands your goals and desires. This someone should have identifiable references, qualified experience, insurance, and the ability to take your project to completion.

Let's look at the secrets that will help prevent you from having a similar experience. Here are the Six Secrets to Successful Construction Projects.

## Secret #1 – AVOID COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

1. If the Better Business Bureau doesn't have any complaints against the company, they must be qualified. This is a common and often costly misconception. Just because a company doesn't have any complaints with the BBB, does not mean you are working with a reputable professional. You need to investigate further. Many companies, though they have no BBB complaints, do not do a satisfactory job (much less a superior job). To insure you are dealing with reputable professional, use the BBB as a starting place, not the only place. Keep in mind the BBB is not a government agency and it does not keep a record on every business in town. There are several very reputable professionals with no BBB record at all.
2. Going with the lowest price saves you money. NO, not necessarily! Everyone looks for the lowest price. On a low estimate, you must ask yourself what is being left out or what shortcut is being taken. Especially on smaller jobs no blueprints are given, no material spec, no details on what exactly is to be done. It is not possible to expect that everyone is pricing the same thing. Do you want to be in the middle of the job and start questioning the quality of material or workmanship? The fleeting sweetness of price is forgotten in the long term reality of an inferior product. A recent job involved the replacement of a defective patio door. The client called me to say she had found a cheaper door on sale - shouldn't we buy it rather than the unit I had recommended? My point to her was that we would not be doing this job at all except that someone had fallen prey to cheaper door and it had to be replaced. She saw the wisdom in the argument and she got a long term solution rather than a short term savings.
3. Doing it yourself saves money. NO! Sometimes the "weekend warrior" can undertake small projects like painting, hanging wallpaper, routine repairs, etc. Beware of undertaking large, more complicated projects. What starts out as an attempt to save money can turn into a costly mess. All too often, the job is botched and it costs more to have a reputable professional come in and fix what has been done. Usually the problem is a lack of expertise. Ask yourself this – would you hire yourself to complete a construction project for someone else? Do you want a messy project that goes on forever, or a professional job done quickly. Regularly, I encourage homeowners to take part in the project in areas they have abilities in. Money can be saved, but the project as a whole is more than most people should take on.
4. If a person claims to have many years of experience, they must do quality work. NO! I can't tell you how many people receive bad workmanship from contractors who have claimed to have been in business or the trade for twenty years. Take experience claims with a grain of salt. Just because a contractor claims to have twenty years of experience does not mean he has experience in your project. You could do carpentry work for twenty years and never have done a three piece crown molding or be an expert hanging doors. Do they have experience in your needs or are you an experiment?

## **Secret #2 – COMMON SCAMS**

1. Today Only discounts. If a contractor ever tells you the price is good for “today only,” show him the door. Quite often they’ll provide you with a story that by signing today you’re entitled to a “model home” or “advertising” discount. The story revolves around the need to use your home as a model to advertise their services in the neighborhood. They mark their prices up just to give you this false discount. Don’t be fooled. This is an old trick used to pressure homeowners into making a quick decision. This is your money we’re talking about! Quickly ask these sales people to leave.
2. Avoid high pressure salespeople. You should never feel pressured into making a decision about choosing your contractor. If you ever feel that a salesperson is pressuring you, ask them to back off. If they persist, it’s time to look for a new contractor. High pressure usually leads to a bad decision when remodeling. A qualified, reputable professional would never pressure anyone into a project. Keep in mind that the high pressure salesperson on a car lot can put you into a car you may not like but you can always trade it in. Ever try trading in your home? First make sure the project is what you want and the contractor is whom you want to do it.
3. Beware of “door-to-door” contractors. These people may not be contractors at all. Never allow them into your home until you have checked them out thoroughly! I can’t stress this enough. It was recently reported that two men pretending to be contractors entered a home, and while one took the owner on a pretend inspection, the other was going through purses and picking up items that could be sold quickly. Some contractors working in your area may put out flyers or come to your door soliciting additional work in the area. These contractors could be honest reputable people. You should not invite them in. Instead, politely ask them for their business card and the name address and telephone number of the people they are working for. Then make an appointment with that homeowner to take a look at the quality of their work.

## **Secret #3 – How to choose the right contractor, 7 questions to ask before inviting them into you home**

1. Do you carry General Liability Insurance? Make sure your contractor carries general liability insurance. This insurance protects your property in case of damage caused by the contractor and or his employees. The insurance company pays for the cost of repairing or replacing any damage that occurs.
2. Will you provide me with a written lien waiver. Your contractor should provide you with a written lien waver at the end of the job. This is a real estate legal document that says you the homeowner have paid the contractor in full for the services rendered and the contractor waives his right to place a mechanics lien on your property.
3. Will you pull all the required building permits? When a contractor pulls all the required building permits you know things will be done to “code.” Also, many

- homeowners insurance policies require pulling a permit on any major projects to keep your home properly covered. Many contractors prefer not to pull permits because of the time involved and the hassle with inspectors. Some contractors will ask you to pull the permits. This could be a warning sign that they are not licensed or the work is beyond their license. A reputable contractor will permit every job where a permit is required.
4. Do you guarantee your work? Your contractor should guarantee their work for at least one year. Some will guarantee their work for two or three years.
  5. Who will be in charge of the job? Make sure the contractor or his foreman is on the job when work is being done – especially if subcontractors are involved. The responsible party should be intimately familiar with every aspect of the job. If you won't be home during construction and must leave the house unlocked, you must feel comfortable. You can't be worried about what is going on when you're not there.
  6. Will you provide me with written references? You should look for a well established contractor who can give you several client references from the last six months or year.
  7. How do you handle the inevitable mess? Construction is dusty dirty work! It gets everywhere, especially if sanding is involved. Make sure the contractor will make an honest effort to keep dust contained, or notify you when heavy dust operations will take place so you can cover your things. Make sure the contractor agrees to sweep up and remove debris daily. Have an agreed upon place for debris to be stored.

#### **Secret #4 The biggest mistakes homeowners make and how to avoid them**

1. Listening to the wrong people. It never ceases to amaze me how many people take advice on their construction project from people who are unqualified to give such critical advice. Quite often, when I see messes, I ask how this happened and I hear things like: *My brother-in-law told me to do that. He used to do work like this on the side when he was a student. I asked the guy in the office next to mine. He did the same thing when he lived in Wisconsin. I read an article by so-and-so that said we should.....* Everyone's got an opinion on what you should do with your money. Just because someone is your friend, relative, or thinks they know construction, doesn't mean they know the answers to your questions or problems. If you have an idea or thought about improving your home, call a reputable, qualified professional to answer your questions.
2. Call the references you're given. So many people start out on the right track by asking for references, but then never call them. Take a few minutes to talk to these people. Most will be happy to take your call. Ask if they got a quality job done on time and at the agreed upon price. Ask if the contractor was easy to reach and easy to deal with.

#### **Secret #5 How to tell if your project will run smoothly – before you sign the contract.**

1. Good communication. If you can talk to each other, you can work out any details that may come up. When you leave a message does he call you back, does he listen to you? Nothing is more important than believing your contractor understands your needs or concerns. If your contractor is so busy he can't return calls or E-mails, maybe it's time to look for someone else. You should always feel that both of you are on the same page. This can avoid miscommunication and costly errors. Choose someone who will listen to you.
2. Comfort. If you feel comfortable with your contractor, the chances are good your project will run smoothly. Think about it. You are inviting a stranger into your home. Do you find that person polite, considerate and courteous. Did they make you feel they were very interested in your project. You will be working with this person for days, weeks or months. Do you want this person around?
3. Trustworthy. You should believe this person is trustworthy. Keep in mind that if your project involves entry into your home, and you won't be home you are granting the keys to your home to them.
4. Completion. Will you get a reasonable estimate of how long the project will take? Remember, you're trying to get your project done, not gain a roommate. Nothing is more frustrating than a job that drags on endlessly.
5. Written Proposal. I've seen contractors look at complex jobs, pick a price out of thin air, scribble a price on the back of a business card, and give it to the homeowner. Show these people the door. They are either not interested in your job or are going to use change orders cost to eat all your money. You need a detailed proposal stating materials, work to be done, cost, and payment schedule.
6. Details. Work out the details before work begins. When can work start in the morning. Do you want work done on weekends? Where can we put the dumpster?
7. Flexibility. Any project is an interruption to your normal lifestyle. Consider how the project will affect your daily life and work together to deal with that.
8. Appearance. If your contractor has a neat appearance, this is a good sign of things to come. This may seem silly but it is not. Don't expect a tie but neatness does count. Is he clean? Is his truck presentable, or falling apart with tools and materials scattered everywhere. If he doesn't care what his things look like, why would he care what yours look like?
9. Down payment. If they ask for a large deposit up-front, this could be a sign they are not in good financial shape, do you want to inherit this problem? A fair down payment should not exceed one third unless custom ordered items are needed before starting. As work progresses and identifiable bench-marks have been reached, expect scheduled payments.
10. Change orders. There is always the chance you may wish to change a material or contract item. Ask how change orders are handled. They should be on separate document showing what is being changed and how much it will affect cost and schedule.

## **Secret #6 – Plan Your Project**

Plan your project with a qualified expert.

Most people spend more time planning their vacation than they do with a construction project. Even if your project doesn't need an engineer or an architect, you still need a clear, detailed plan. You need an expert to determine if an architect or engineer is needed. If you are planning an upcoming project, sit down with a qualified contractor and get all your questions answered.

You need someone to help you through the maze of planning, not to mention the "red tape" awaiting you at the building department. They are great people but it helps to speak the language.

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As you probably guessed, this is the way Hickory Nut Builders does business.

Initially, I provide a FREE, NO OBLIGATION interview to listen to your needs, and concerns and to see if I can be of service to your family.

Hopefully, I can show you how to make your home absolutely gorgeous, something you can be proud of.

If all this makes sense, and you like my approach, please give me a call at (828) 772-4147

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