

How to Hire the Right Contractor

Need a contractor? Here are 12 tips on finding the right contractor

Everyone has heard the expression, "You get what you pay for." This saying is never more relevant than when you're planning a home improvement or remodeling project involves hiring a contractor. Going by price alone increases the risk of project failure and can lead to higher costs down the road.



With the proper planning and a knowledgeable contractor, you can be assured of a job well done at a reasonable cost. Remember that home improvement or remodeling can be a fun experience for both you and your family. You should always choose the contractor you feel most comfortable working with.

1. Connect with your contractor

The right person for the job will be easy to talk to. Make sure you see eye to eye by hiring a contractor that understands your goals and has experience in the type of job you are looking for. Communication is key for all projects, so insist on regular contact by email, phone or text messages. Allow the work

crew to manage their day-to-day work, but set up a weekly face-to-face update from the foreman.

2. Understand that price reflects quality

Ask your contractor for his or her recommendations on how the project should take place. In the long run, is it worth cutting corners for a temporary fix? The lowest bid is not always the best. Request a written description of the materials necessary for the job. A low bid may indicate that a contractor uses sub-par materials or is desperate for work. The more accurate bid is likely somewhere in the middle.

3. Know a contractor's credentials

Before you hire a contractor, be sure you understand their qualifications, including any certifications they have from national trade organizations.



Abbreviations behind your contractor's name can represent certifications from national trade organizations. These indicate that the company belongs to certain organizations that bind them to a strict code of ethics. Such memberships, titles and abbreviations include certified graduate remodeler (CGR), certified aging in place specialist (CAPS), local Building Industry Association membership (BIA) and National Association of Home Builders membership ([NAHB](#)). Also, insist on hiring a [licensed, bonded and insured](#)

contractor. This is a must. Otherwise, as the property owner you are liable if a member of the work crew gets injured on the job.

4. Get your home improvement contract in writing

Your contract should include: detailed time frames, the total cost, payment arrangements, your contractor's license number, project description, names of parties involved and how to handle additional costs if necessary. Be cautious; if you are not given a timeline for the job to be completed, this may indicate the contractor has several current jobs and may not complete your job in a timely manner. Keep track of all-important information as well by keeping job-related documents such as contracts, payments and receipts in one place. Record key contact information for everyone working on your project.



5. Be upfront about your home improvement budget

If necessary, break the project down into multiple phases. Although this may increase the total cost due to repetitious start-up expenses and inflation, it may also be a better option for you to spread out the cost over time. Homeowners can often save money by doing some tasks on their own, such as cleaning and painting.

6. Educate yourself about home improvement requirements

Know what permits are required and what regulations need to be followed for your remodeling project. Your contractor or [architect](#) should be responsible for applying for and acquiring all necessary permits. Don't be passive, however; ask for information. Know what's going on behind the scenes. The cost of the job will increase if the contractor is surprised by outdated wiring or other concealed budget busters.



7. Be prepared for home renovation

Before a job begins, make sure your home is prepared. That includes having an area where workers can store their tools, and sealing the site's entry point. (Angie's List/Eldon Lindsay)

- Select your colors and finishes before the painter arrives to save time.
- Review sample materials to make sure you are happy with them.
- Don't forget to make space for the crew. Allow them to keep their supplies and equipment on site. The more organized and accessible these items are, the faster they will be able to do their work.

Try to avoid any potential loss. Remove any valuables or easily damaged items from the work site.

- Prevent dust accumulation by sealing the entry point with plastic sheeting and blue painter's tape.
- Finally, have a "go-to-guy." Pick someone to be the key contact between the contractor and the family. This will help keep communication clean and clear to avoid confusion.

8. Wait to start demolition

Begin demolition only after the new equipment and supplies have arrived, including windows, doors, appliances or any other essential items.



9. Be courteous of your neighbors during your renovation

Inform the work crew where your property lines are located to prevent materials from being placed in the wrong area.

10. Be respectful to your contractor

You may think that, for a contractor, a job is a job. They show up, magically finish the work, and get paid -- thank you very much. But that's not all there is to it, at least not for the contractors who are extremely good at what they do.

Sure, taking pride in the job, doing the best they can do, and personal satisfaction is usually enough for a skilled tradesperson. But I can tell you that the difference between an acceptable outcome and an exceptional one can be something as simple -- and as important -- as how much the contractor likes you. Or, if the personal dynamic is really bad, how much he or she dislikes you.

This isn't about a popularity contest. It's about treating the contractor like a human being. So often homeowners treat their contractor like nameless, faceless, hired help and yet still expect them to treat their home with love and respect and give the project 110 percent.

We all have feelings. The contractor who is getting selective about clients summed it up best: "Why should I choose to work for someone who is passive-aggressive towards me, when I can work for someone who genuinely appreciates my efforts?" Exactly. If I can pick and choose my jobs, why wouldn't I choose to work with people who work well with me?

If a contractor isn't enjoying his/her work environment, they'll do everything possible to finish that job so they can get the heck out of a negative environment. Believe me, I've seen it many times. I know in my case, I'd try to do little extra things for the homeowner who treated me well. The rewards of treating your contractor with respect are sometimes noticeable and sometimes not. But still, it won't kill you to be nice.

I've heard from many homeowners that they keep calling contractors but, after a first meeting, they never hear back from them. That might be because some contractors are just not any good at following through, or at doing what they say they will. But it might be because the contractor has decided the homeowners just won't appreciate him.

11. Keep your eye on the renovation prize

Although the project will be disruptive, don't forget that the end result will be worth it.

12. Ensure things are complete before signing off on the renovation

Schedule a final walkthrough. Meet with your contractor and make note of any tasks that need to be completed. Be sure to request an affidavit of final release or lien wavier. Once the job is complete and the final payment is made, this clears you of any liability for third-party claims.