

Finding a Contractor

Spring is just around the corner, and we all know that in spring a young man's (or woman's) fancy turns to thoughts of . . . remodeling. Though some of this may fall in the category of do-it-yourself work, many projects will require the help of professional contractors.

Building professionals fall in to two general categories—general contractors and subcontractors. Subcontractors are specialists in one particular trade, such as plumbing, framing, concrete, etc. while general contractors arrange for the services and coordinate the work of subcontractors.

Usually, general contractors are paid a fee based on an agreed percentage of the project cost. The going rate locally these days is around 18%. Many people consider acting as their own general contractor in order to save this fee. But, be advised that you will earn every penny of it. Unless you have unusual connections in the building industry, it is a challenge to find multiple competent subcontractors in the many areas needed to bid out and complete a remodeling project. Once found, the next hurdle is to try to schedule them in the proper order and keep the job moving along. Experienced subcontractors

and the larger service companies (such as plumbers and electricians) are in demand, and their loyalty to on-going work (provided by general contractors) will always trump your request for a one-time service. Acting as your own general contractor will almost without exception extend the time required to complete your project.

Whether trying to find a good general or sub-contractor, there are a few techniques that may help. The first is to ask around. Word of mouth is usually the best way for construction workers to promote their services. Ask friends and neighbors if they have any names they can recommend from previous remodeling or repair experiences. Also keep an eye out in your neighborhood. Most construction vehicles have the name of the company or individual on them. Take note of trucks you see more than once. Go ring the doorbell and ask the homeowner if they are pleased with the service they have received.

Watch for remodeling projects in the city that may be similar to what you are contemplating. Again, ask the homeowner who their contractor(s) was. Finding a contractor well skilled in remodeling techniques is

important, because remodeling is a different animal from new construction. Whenever you talk to a contractor, ask for referrals and actually call the individuals to find out how the project went, and if it was on time and on budget.



Finding a competent remodeling professional is half the battle in completing a successful project. (The other half is having a great design!) As we often say, do your homework and don't rush into anything blind. Generally speaking, you can have something good or you can have something fast, but rarely are you going to get anything good and fast! Remodeling is expensive and the results should last for decades, so take the time up front to prepare and carefully select those that will execute the work.

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