



Helpful Tips Before Hiring a General Contractor

If you are planning on a major home improvement like an addition, kitchen remodel or bathroom remodel you will want to hire a general contractor. The general contractor is responsible for coordinating and paying the subcontractors and the materials. Subcontractors have various specialty trades such as plumbing, electrical, drywall and concrete that the general contractor may out-source. The general contractor is responsible for managing the job site and the various people he or she has hired to complete the job.

Try to choose a general contractor through personal recommendations. Hopefully someone you know refers a general contractor to you. Try to get referrals from neighbors or friends that have had similar work done to their home.

After you have put together a list of three general contractors, call them and prequalify them over the phone.

Ask them questions like:

- Are you licensed?
- Ask for their license so you can go on line and look up their public record at cslb.ca.gov.
- Ask them if they are insured with workers compensation, property damage and liability?
- Ask them for a few satisfied customers names and phone numbers.
- Take time to call those references and ask them questions, can you come and see their work?
- Do they have their own crew or do they rely only on committed subcontractors?
- Will they be working or supervising? If supervising how often will they check the jobsite?
- When are they available to start your project? And how long will it take to finish?
- When is the start and complete date?
- Ask whether your job will be the only one on their schedule or will they be managing multiple projects?
- Will the contractor be on the site to supervise your job daily or hand it off to his foreman?

Request a formal bid from three contractor candidates.

- Make sure you give all three the exact plans with the exact specifications!
- Review the plans with them and be honest about your expectations.
- They in turn should be honest with you of budget, time and disruption to your home.
- Listen to them and have them be specific.

Request a formal bid from three contractor candidates. (continued)

- Don't go with what you want to hear.
- Ask each contractor if they can suggest any cost saving ideas?
- Ask them to point out any high cost items.

Request a breakdown bid, one that spells out plumbing, framing, cabinets, electrical, etc.

- Agree on a date for the bids submission.
- Find out how long the bid will be valid - the period should be at least 30 days.
- When the bids come in don't automatically choose the lowest bid. Some contractors hide not so obvious costs so as to get the job and then you find out later that they had hidden costs.
- Generally if the bid looks too good to be true it probably is. If the lowest bid is really low be suspicious of inexperience or hidden costs.
- Reliability, quality of work and on time performance are all very valuable factors.
- Ask to see a website or photographs of some of the projects.
- Make a visit to a past client and ask them about the craftsmanship, cleanliness and punctuality.

These are all very pertinent questions.

Do you like your general contractor? Chemistry, positive energy with you and your family and your general contractor is crucial.

- Make sure you like him or her.
- Could you see them in your home for three months?
- Do you feel comfortable around them?
- If you have children or pets, do they feel comfortable too?
- Price is important but it isn't everything.
- You could have some difficult issues creep up over the course of the project, do you feel like you could be direct and be heard from the contractor.
- You want to make sure you have a professional who won't walk off your job because he or she is a hot head.
- Do your research now and trust your gut.

When you have made your selection, ask to see their general contractor's license and ask for a certificate of insurance.

Request a written contract. At this point you and your general contractor should agree upon a written contract supplied to you from the general contractor. Both of you need to sign it, all parties must sign.

The contract should include:

- All names of the adults responsible for the home project and the General contractor's full name.

Request a written contract. (continued)

- You should also have addresses and all details of work that is to be performed.
- Specify who will be responsible for demolition, clean up, trash collection and dust control.
- It is fair for a contractor to charge you for changes and modifications that are not in the plans, particularly changes that will require more work or more expensive materials.
- All changes should have a change order signed by both parties.
- An exact description of the work to be done and the materials to be ordered.
- On materials make sure your budget is high enough or that there is an allowance for items you have not selected yet like plumbing fixtures.
- Be sure the budget is high enough to cover all costs.
- After deciding on materials spell out your choices in your contract including name brands and model numbers.
- Make sure all appliances, cabinets, granite are what you ordered in the beginning. Specify these things in your contract.
- Be sure to include a completion date and detail on when payments will be made.
- Never pay more than completed work and ordered materials.
- It is OK to ask to see paid invoices if you so require.
- Do not pay more than a 10% deposit at the signing of the contract.
- Make additional payments as the work progresses, this should be listed and specified in your signed contract.
- You want to give your contractor a reason to show up every day, make sure you pay on time.
- You don't want your contractor disappearing, so don't ever pay too far in advance.
- Have a not to exceed amount in your contract, make sure you leave room for extras and change orders.
- Written confirmation of any guarantees.
- Don't sign a completion statement or give the final payment until the final inspection and punch list is complete.

These books will give you some additional help:

The Unofficial Guide to Hiring Contractors by Duncan Calder Stephens

Hiring Contractors Without Going Through Hell by Ellis Levinson

How to Hire a Contractor Without Getting Chiseled by Thomas Philbin

The above information is provided as a guideline to assist you in selecting a general contractor. Ultimately, responsibility of the outcome of your project has no association with the author.