

A CUSTOMER'S CHECKLIST

7 BASIC RULES FOR SELECTING A GREAT CONTRACTOR AND GETTING GOOD PRICES!

There are logical steps to take in bidding out your painting, decorating, and drywall finishing work. The contractors whom you consider for your project will respect your efforts to organize an efficient and fair selection process...while you will enjoy the dual rewards of hiring a qualified company and paying a reasonable price!

There are many advantages to hiring a professional painting or drywall finishing contractor...not the least of which is getting the job done promptly and neatly. Too often, a homeowner with the best of intentions commences a project that goes on endlessly...and ends up looking terrible. Likewise, a business owner may be tempted to have employees do the painting or drywall work, which is a poor use of their time and company money.

A professional's touch will make a very visible difference for what it costs...by avoiding paint on your carpets, crooked wallpaper, bad taping and other quality control and workmanship problems.

Bringing in a "pro" is, ideally, a process...not an event. It should be handled in an orderly manner to get the best results. Our Seven Rules for managing the bidding process can help protect both your property and your wallet.

1. Define the Scope of Work

One common customer error is failing to develop a clear concept of the project. The scope of work must be put in writing. Make an itemized list, with specifications for materials to be used. This will allow competing contractors to all render bids that can be compared "apples to apples." If you tell three contractors three different stories about what you want done, you will get three bids that cannot be intelligently compared to one

another. You should be open to options and suggestions, however.

2. Shop for Qualified Bidders

Ask people you know for names of contractors they may be able to recommend...tradesmen they have worked with satisfactorily in the past. Call the trade association for painting, decorating, and drywall finishing contractors to request a Directory of Members...several of whom may be located nearby. It is called "PDCA/FCA" (which means Painting & Decorating Contractors of America/Finishing Contractors Association). Call 630/393-1313 for Chicago area contractors.

3. Ask for References

Any contractor should be proud to provide customer references upon request, as part of a the bid package. You should check those references; call for verifications. Ask about workmanship, timely completion, pricing, and so forth.

4. Ask for Samples

A professional contractor may be able to furnish sample boards of his work, or invite the customer to visit an office showroom or current jobsites. Someone who gives a blank stare when asked about samples should be shown the door.

5. Verify Insurance Coverage

An insurance certificate should routinely be requested as part of the bid package. A million dollars of liability coverage is not usually considered excessive. Beware of the contractor who does not carry insurance protection!

6. Verify Other Credentials

Ask the contractor to provide other business credentials, such as memberships in his Chamber of Commerce or Chicago PDCA/FCA. As Union contractors, you can call

Painters' District Council No. 14 in Chicago (312/421-0046) to verify that prospective contractor firms are in good standing. You should only hire a contractor that is very conscientious about paying wages and benefits to employees.

7. Throw Out Extremely Low Bids

It is a good policy to get at least three bids for a major project. It is, conversely, wise to throw out any bid that is suspiciously lower than the others. There are a few unscrupulous operators in the business who make a practice of "lowballing" a bid to get the job... then the workmanship suffers, or the price rises through extra fees.

SUMMARY & CONCLUSIONS

Timing can be very helpful in contractor dealings, for the best pricing is usually available in the off-season. It pays to be prepared and business-like with contractors by preparing a written description of the scope of work. Do your homework before giving the job to anyone...be sure all bid documents are in order, check references, and don't assume that the low bidder should get the job.

With respect to contractors, as in other service industries, the old adage, "You get what you pay for," still applies. By following our Seven Rules, you can get both a quality job *and* your money's worth...which is really the best of both worlds!

