

How to Select a Contractor Without Getting Hosed

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Anyone who has remodeled or built a house probably has a story to tell – some good, and surely some are nightmares! Surprisingly, many people select a contractor from the Yellow Pages and don't even interview them first. Sometimes the rush to grab the first available contractor is because you've waited until you had an emergency repair and you don't have time to go through a lengthy selection process.

You should build a contact list before you have an emergency and start the top of the list with a good plumbing and heating contractor since those are usually the most desperate calls. This may seem overwhelming but it's really pretty simple. We're not suggesting you get a bid for work you don't need, but try to at least get the names before you need them of some well recommended emergency contractors.

One of the easiest and best ways to select a possible contractor is to get references from friends, family or a Realtor you trust. Of course Google and Social Media have helped avoid the bad apples in Google searches. You can also check with your local Chamber of Commerce for recommendations. For example, Legacy Plumbing serves North Dallas, Collin and Denton Counties, and just received the "Small Business of the Year" Award presented by the Chamber of Commerce for 2011 – a very reputable award with prestigious nominees. Their award not only gives them credibility but it gives local consumers an automatic referral because you know their business has been scrutinized and researched by a committee.

Whatever method you search or select a contractor, be sure that you meet with them, look for "chemistry" or rapport between you and them and observe their level of professionalism. Courtesy, respect, punctuality and the ability to communicate are some of the most important attributes a contractor can have next to their basic competency.

Wes Carter of Carter's Home Repair and Remodeling that also serves all of the North Dallas area shared that he is amazed at how many people call for a quote, but then drop the ball when it comes to the follow through. "Either a customer is desperate or has never been educated on things to look for," says Carter, "Many times I give an estimate and all the homeowner wants to know is when can



you start, finish, and how much is this going to cost. There is so much more you can do to feel good about the contractor you hire, whether it's for a big or small job."

Here's a checklist of things to consider when selecting your contractor.

Yes, even little jobs require checklists! Carter suggests the ratings of "Best", "Good", "OK", "Fair" and "Reject" to classify important things to do:

Getting Names of Possible Contractors:

- You have had good personal prior experience working with contractor [BEST]
- Reliable referral from direct experience of family or friends [GOOD]
- You know of the contractor's reputation but have no direct experience [OK]
- You found them from a trade association or general advertising [FAIR]

State Contractor Licensing (licensed contractors must provide the number):

- Licensed; has never had a complaint filed or had disciplinary action taken [BEST]
- Licensed; has no prior complaints filed for at least 3 or more years [FAIR]
- Licensed; current complaints or actions against them within the past 3 years [REJECT]
- Contractor has no license [REJECT]

Insurance (ask to see their certificates):

- Workman's Compensation and General Liability [BEST]
- General Liability only (bodily injury and property damage) [GOOD]
- Contractor has no insurance [REJECT]

Business Longevity:

- In business more than 10 years with the same name [BEST]
- In business 5 or more years with the same name [GOOD]
- In business 1 to 5 years with the same name [OK]
- New business under 1 year [FAIR]

Stability and Permanence:

- Has a physical business office and address [BEST]

- Has only a Home office or answering service [FAIR]

- Cell phone contact only, no office [REJECT]

Reference Check (yes, you should check references)

- Positive prior current references from at least 5 customers [BEST]
- 1 to 4 positive references from past customers [FAIR]
- No real references or negative references provided [REJECT]

Experience

- Specializes in the work you want performed [BEST]
- Can perform the work you want but also does other types of work [OK]
- Little to no experience in the work you want performed [REJECT]

Scope and Price:

- Detailed description of the scope of work
- Assumptions (if any) are clear and accurate
- Contractor DID NOT offer discount to "sign up now"
- Contractor will Guarantee the work
- All verbal Contractor representations are in writing
- No more than 25% to 33% asked for up front
- Final payment not required until work is complete

Once the job is completed, do a completed walk through of the job and check the small details as well as the overall picture. This is your only chance to have things fixed that are wrong before you give the contractor his final payment and check him off on the job.

Most reputable contractors will gladly respond to future concerns if the job is warranted but it can be hard to prove two months later that a certain task was not done if you checked it off so going down a list is a good way to be thorough and not cause unnecessary conflicts with your contractor.

Hopefully when you're done you will be happy enough with the contractor you choose to use him again and recommend him to your friends and family who need a project done.