

Contractors – What to expect. By Paul R. Conrado

Contractors. Even the word makes some people shudder. But it doesn't have to. From building and remodeling contractors, to independent technology contractors, there are simple and practical guidelines that will help you navigate and interact with them. This article deals with building and remodeling contractors.

It is difficult to call a contractor to fix, replace, or repair your home. You are never sure what the person on the other end of the phone is like, and you have heard so many horror stories about them. Stories about greed, sloppiness, and plain fraud.

While some of these stories are true, it is only half of the story; the wrong half. Most of the contractors I know, and the only ones I deal with on a daily basis, are caring, helpful, responsible, professional business people who understand they are in the service business. People who care about the people they serve and the product they deliver.

After 26 years in the business, I know what to look for and the questions to ask when selecting contractors. But how do you? The following is what you should expect when selecting a contractor for your home service needs:

Expect a prompt call back – you should be called back within 24 hours. If you are not, then the contractor does not understand the meaning of “being of service”. Maybe they are too busy, or just disorganized. Either way, they are probably not the one for you.

Expect them to ask a lot of questions – contractors are constantly being asked to give advice and estimates. Successful contractors make sure your project fits what they do, so they don't waste a lot of time on projects that don't fit their profile.

Expect them to be licensed – a contractor in California is required, by law, to be licensed for any amount of work that exceeds \$500. Anyone who says they are not required to be licensed is either misrepresenting the truth, or delusional. The California courts have held that you are not required to pay unlicensed contractors, and they have no legal recourse to collect.

Expect to get some kind of estimate for the work to be performed – Construction projects are complicated with many unknowns. The more unknowns that exist, the less accurate the pricing will be. At least find out what the hourly charges will be for labor, and how much mark-up is added to materials used. This way you can watch what is being done and keep track of what you are spending.

Expect payment schedules to be fair – do not pay for work that has not been done. Spread out the payments so you pay only for work that has been done and/or materials that have been delivered to the site. It is okay to pay a deposit for materials that are being fabricated off-site (for instance, windows, granite countertops, and cabinets). California state laws require contract deposit to not exceed 10% of the total amount, or \$1,000, whichever is less.

Construction is a business of expectations. You expect the work to be done to your satisfaction, and contractors expect to be paid on time. Successful projects happen when expectations are aligned. Take the time to ask the important questions so that your expectations are met. If you don't know what questions to ask, ask me.