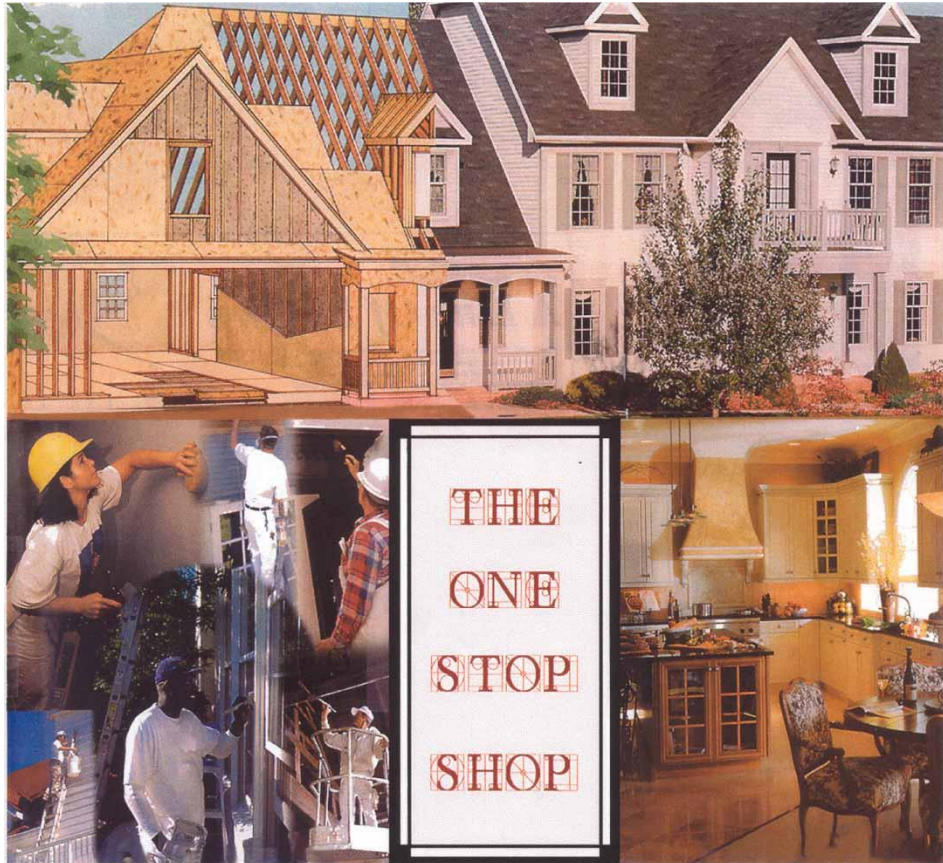


How To Eliminate The Fear of Remodeling

And Be Absolutely Certain You'll Get Your Job
Done Right!



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Facing The Fear

Thinking about remodeling or painting your home? Scared of making a mistake? You are absolutely right to be concerned. The Better Business Bureau gets more complaints for home improvements than any other category except automotive repairs. It doesn't have to be that way. Follow this plan and know you'll have success.

Most articles written for homeowners contemplating a home improvement project list all the standard rules for selecting the right Contractor, dealing with legal aspects, etc. What they fail to do is give enough information on how to properly assess your personal needs and the make sure those needs get translated into an outstanding finished product.

Our goal is to give you the confidence to take charge of your project so you can make sure you get exactly what you need and want, at a price you want to pay. In other words, **to make it happen right**. The first step occurs when it becomes obvious that there is a need to make changes in your living environment. It is out of this need that the project will emerge. But how?

The Value of Planning

First, it is important to understand that proper planning is the most valuable tool you have. Therefore, it is of tremendous value to list all the things you hope to accomplish with remodeling. Try to be as specific as possible. It is amazing how vague people can be about what they want. The more clearly defined your goal, the easier it will be to achieve.

I suggest that you divide your list into two separate areas: start with the physical requirements and then add the aesthetic considerations. When it comes to physical, I'm not referring to the actual construction process, I'm referring to the actual construction process and the specific physical needs. If your project is a room addition, what functions will take place in that room? What furniture arrangement will be used? If it is a kitchen, what types of storage are needed? Often at this point, I find that people begin thinking ahead to solutions. "We need a pantry cabinet for food storage." Don't fall into this trap.

A pantry cabinet may or may not be the best solution to food storage, but don't limit yourself. A much more effective solution may evolve during the planning process. Concern yourself now, with defining your needs and desires.

The aesthetic aspects may be a little more difficult at first but this is the part that yields some of the most interesting results. Begin by standing back and taking an objective look at your home as it is now. What elements do you like? Which do you dislike? Look through as many books and magazines as possible to pick out room settings and architectural features, which appeal to you. Stretch yourself and find pictures you like, which may be more extreme than what you will probably end up with. By stretching your imagination, you open yourself to the possibility of creating a unique, one-of-a-kind environment.

The Design Criterion Controls Your Selection

The combination of physical needs and aesthetic desires will eventually form the **Design Criterion**. Once this is clearly defined you will have a good mental image of what to accomplish. At this point, all the choices to be made throughout the project will be a simple matter of determining whether they support the **Design Criterion** or not.

Of course, the Design Criterion is not the ultimate goal. The budget must be brought into the equation before we can establish the goal. However, choices of materials can vary widely in cost yet still support the design criterion. For example, kitchen counter-tops can be made of laminate, tile, solid surfacing, or granite. While each of these vary substantially in cost, colors from each can be selected which will support the design criterion.

When you finish this initial stage of planning, you will have some guidelines, which will keep focused on the end result. It will also help in selecting and working with the designers, contractors, and others who will be helping your dream become reality.

It is not important for you to formulate the design criterion on your own. There are professionals who can help you with this. However, understanding this process will help you be actively involved and feeling in control of your project, while allowing others to use their expertise in turning out the finished product. You'll be more confident about selecting a contractor, since you'll invariably seek out someone who shares your vision.

Who Will Design Your Remodeling Project

Armed with the list you've made and the picture you've accumulated, you are ready to take the next step – selecting a designer or contractor. You've given lots of thoughts to your home improvements project. Collected information. Dreamed of all the possibilities. You know what you want. Now for the big question. Do you need a designer? Unfortunately, there is no easy answer. Since you've already spent considerable time focusing on your needs, making lists, and looking at pictures, it would appear that the design would pretty much fall in place. It might, but there may be important details, which fall by the wayside.

A talented designer will be aware of the many subtleties, which go into the making of an outstanding project. They will have training, formal or informal, which has prepared them to analyze problems and find solutions. In addition, the designer will have seen a large number of similar projects and be aware of all the pitfalls, what works and what doesn't. And, they will work through the objectives with you to formulate and refine the design criterion so that it fits you like a glove.

It is his or her obligations to be sensitive to your budgetary requirements. It benefits no one if you can't afford to build what is designed. They are usually several solutions, which can lead to successful results, so finding a balance between desires and budget are not as difficult as you might imagine.

Often, people have misconceptions of what a designer is supposed to do for them. They fear that in some way they will be giving control of the project over to someone else. This should never be the case.

By far, the most creative results are born out of the careful collaboration between the two of you. Remember, this is you're project. If you want it to happen right, make sure you have someone you can work with.

So, where do you find this person? Here are the possibilities:

- 1.) A contractor
- 2.) An architect or independent designer
- 3.) A design/build firm
- 4.) You or a friend

It would be great if you could just check out someone's credentials and determine if they meet the required criteria. But the fact is that **creativity is pretty much where you find it.**

Contractors

Many contractors have the skill, expertise, and flair to do an excellent job on the design work. Most don't but the price, which is usually zero, can be pretty attractive. Be careful! You might get a designer that is worth exactly what you paid for.

Architects

Don't make that assumption that all architects and independent designers are the most highly talented and creative people in the business. Many have excellent training on the "nuts and bolts" but may not be particularly adept when it comes to artistic ability. Others will over engineer the dickens out of it and come up with beautiful, detailed expensive drawings that'll send the bids through the roof. Take time to check them out. They'll be the most expensive of all with fees of 5% to 10% of the project cost.

Design/Build

Design/build firms have been increasing in popularity the last few years and for good reason. These companies offer, "concept to completion" capabilities, which brings excellent continuity to the whole process. The cost of the design is usually much lower than other professional design services. A strong point for using one of these firms is that by the time you're done with the plans, you will know whether or not you want them to do construction.

Don't sign a construction contract before you have a complete set of plans and a bid price. You don't want to be committed until you've had ample opportunity to evaluate their contractor.

Alternatives

What about handling the design by yourself, or with a friend? Remember what I said about creativity being where you find it? If you feel there is enough talent involved and the project isn't too complex, go for it. Get the contractors to help with technical aspects and you might get excellent results.

Once you have a working set of plans and a clearly defined design criterion, the selection of a contractor is considerably less formidable.

The Really Big Decision The Contractor

Selecting a contractor is such a disagreeable job for some home owners that many people just give up and forget the whole thing. Others, who are more persistent, suffer through no shows, incompetents, and rude people before finding the right person to hire.

Some of this comes with the territory but there are shortcuts. If you have been dealing with an architect, designer, or design/build firm, your half way there. You'll be considering them or their recommendations. It's a start but don't hesitate to compare them with others.

Do you have friends who have had work done? They can be a good source of information. Don't be dismayed with the prospects of wading through the Yellow Pages. There is a company out there that is a perfect for you.

The important thing is to find someone you feel comfortable with and know they are on your side. If you can't develop a good working relationship before entering into a contract, don't proceed with them. What will happen when things go wrong in the middle of construction?

Ask them to furnish you with the critical information you need: including a list of references. Call these people and go see at least one or two completed projects. I urge you to actually view the homes they've worked on. Talking on the telephone won't tell you everything you need to know. **Taking this step could save you much grief later on.**

Asking The Right Questions

Here are specific questions you need to ask. Some answers will come from the contractor, others from the references.

- 1.) Are they licensed and Bonded with the State Department of Labor & Industries?
- 2.) Is their expertise compatible with the scope of your project?
- 3.) Do they begin jobs on time and diligently follow it through to completion?
- 4.) Do they maintain good communication throughout the jobs?
- 5.) Are they insured for both liability and worker's compensation?
- 6.) Is there a warranty provided of not less than one year?

If you've done your homework well, then you can move forward feeling confident; not only in the contractor but in yourself.

The Art of Protecting Yourself

Next comes the signing of the contract. There is a definite art to writing a good contract. If too little information is on the Agreement, you leave yourself wide open to assumptions and disagreements if it is too complex, it becomes unwieldy and inflexible. What you want is to eliminate the gray areas. You, the contractor, and the construction crew should know exactly what is included and what is not included. If you're in doubt, err on safe side and have it written in.

Since the design process ideally continues throughout the project, a certain amount of flexibility in the contract is acceptable. Good craftsmen have a whole bag of tricks for putting together the components of a job and they need to be given the freedom to inject their own creativity and experience.

Good Communications Is Essential

The secret of getting construction details finished the way you want to establish and maintain good communication with all parties involved. **You don't want to become the general contractor but you need to feel connected to the process.** Even if this only means looking the work over at night and having a short phone conversation with the foreman, you'll still have some control.

The contractor should have a well-defined method of establishing and maintaining quick and efficient channels of communication. If they don't, be very cautious. You should be able to reach them when you need them.

Construction – A Bumpy Road

Be prepared for the normal ups and downs associated with remodeling. These are stages when progress moves with miraculous speed only to be followed by periods best compared with snails. In addition, if there are different tradesmen involved, the whole process becomes herky-jerky, start and stop. It can be madding but it helps to know it's normal.

If something isn't going the way you expect it should, don't sit back quietly back and hope for the best. Ask questions. You deserve an answer. Find someone who can give them to you. Talk to a supervisor, the designer, or even the building inspector, if necessary. But make sure you are comfortable with what has been done. In extreme cases, stop the work. This is your house and you have the right to stop a project, which has been completed in accordance with the design criterion. Not everything will go perfectly but a good company will be diligent about solving the problems, which arise.

Can you see it now? The finished project? Remodeling is an adventure, which can happen right. When the dust has settled, the results will be a source of great pride and accomplishment. What are you waiting for!

How Can We Be Of Service?

Your Blankenship's Labor professional is a good place to start when it comes to remodeling or painting your home. The first visit to your home is always free. There is never a long-winded sales pitch – we don't like them anymore than you do.

Instead, this is a time for us to listen, then discuss options, address the realities, and answer all of your questions and concerns. Whether you choose to hire us or not, our goal is always to make you happy that we were there. The normal reaction we get from our clients is a hearty thanks for taking the time to give out the benefits of our knowledge and experience.

I hope this little booklet has proven to be as informative and inspirational to you as possible. Good luck on the remodeling of your home!