

What Are The Questions I Should Ask Potential Contractors?

When a group of NARI remodeling contractors were asked what questions homeowners asked most frequently, the group unanimously agreed that their most popular queries were:

When can you start?

When will you be finished?

What time will you knock on my door each morning?

What time will you quit for the day?

Are you going to work every day?

Can you finish before (insert any major holiday or significant family event)?

How much will it cost per square foot?

Unfortunately, these are not the type of questions that are going to tell you much about a particular remodeling contractor.

"While a reasonable timetable is important," says Stanforth, "it shouldn't be the primary focus of an interview or a job - neither should budget. Homeowners should be focusing on trust and quality. If you find someone who is reputable and trustworthy, the budget and timeline will fall into place."

He recommends homeowners start by asking questions about a company's business practices and experience in a similar type of home remodeling project. If you decide you want to hire a particular contractor, then you can discuss when he or she can start, what time he or she can knock on your door each morning and when you will have your home to yourselves again. These are all items that can be discussed at a pre-construction meeting.

Here are some questions NARI members recommend you ask before signing a remodeling contract:

How long have you been in business?

Who will be assigned as project supervisor for the job?

Who will be working on the project? Are they employees or subcontractors?

Does your company carry workers compensation and liability insurance?

(Always verify insurance information by calling the agency. A copy of an insurance certificate does not let you know if the policy is still current. Even if the certificate has an expiration date, you cannot tell if either party has canceled the insurance. If licensing is required in your state also ask if the contractor is licensed and call to verify compliance with the law. Not all states offer or require licensing. Check with your local or state government agencies.)

What Are The Questions I Should Ask Potential Contractors? Continued...

*What is your approach to a project such as this?
How many projects like mine have you completed in the past year?
May I have a list of references from those projects?
May I have a list of business referrals or suppliers?
What percentage of your business is repeat or referral business?
Are you a member of a national trade association?*

Have you or your employees been certified in remodeling or had any special training or education, such as earning a Certified Remodeler (CR), Certified Remodeler Specialist (CRS), Certified Aging in Place Specialist (CAPS), Certified Lead Carpenter (CLC), GC (Licensed General Contractor), CEAC (Certified Environmental Access Consultant), or Certified Kitchen & Bath Remodeler (CKBR) designation?

It's also important to realize that sometimes it's not the answers you get that are significant, but what you don't get. Asking the right questions is not enough. You need to pay attention to your instincts and to what information is missing.

Unlike your accountant or stockbroker, your home improvement contractor will be a part of your daily life and available for some on-the-job education. He or she will be privy to your personal life, more so than your doctor or lawyer. Your contractor will know how you look early in the morning and how well behaved your dog is. It makes sense that you should take some time to carefully select this person and make sure that it is someone you can ask questions of.

Once you do find that person, you can get down to asking the more interesting questions like: What exactly is a sleeper and a cricket? What do alligators have to do with painting? And what do aprons have to do with remodeling?

Remodeling can be a fun experience. You get to create your dream room or home and learn a little about design and building along the way. All you need to do is ask questions. Questions that, according to NARI members, remodelers don't feel they are hearing enough. So tap into your curiosity and ask away.