

CLIENT COMMUNICATION TOOLBOX

FOLLOW THESE PRACTICAL TIPS
FOR HAPPIER HOMEOWNERS AND
MORE PROFITABLE PROJECTS

Professional remodelers need to be ready for the unexpected. Success comes from controlling the things that you can influence and being prepared to adapt. Yet as good as you may be at managing your planning, your time, your crew, and your preparation, there is always one big wild card: your homeowner clients. Effectively managing homeowners can make the difference between a profitable job with happy customers and a moneylosing project that sets your business back with a negative online review.



Barbara Anne Eagles, owner of Total Construction Solutions in Raleigh, North Carolina, sees a key difference between new construction and remodeling: *"With additions and remodels, we don't know what we're going to get into. Even as much planning as we do up front, we just don't know what we're going to get hit with. It's a surprise every single job."*

BEWARE OF COMMUNICATION BREAKDOWNS

According to research from BuildBook, 72 percent of client disputes can be directly attributed to poor communication. Some of the most common issues between contractors and homeowners that impact success are:

MISUNDERSTANDINGS:

Confusion and lack of alignment between remodeler and customer around what's going to be done, how, and when

ASSUMPTIONS:

Decisions based on guesses of what the customer wants—often made in the interest of speed

SLOW CUSTOMER RESPONSES AND DECISIONS:

Causing delays or leading to assumptions and misunderstandings

CHANGES AND INDECISION:

Resulting in costly adjustments and delays

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Source: BuildBook

Working these powerful communication practices and tips into your client interactions will help you avoid many of these kinds of profit-killing problems.



GET INTO THE MIND OF THE HOMEOWNER

It's important to understand the perspective and mindset of homeowners. There's a good chance that they've never done a significant remodel before, and they can only imagine what the experience will be like. This will also probably be one of the most expensive things they've ever written checks for. Both could cause a lot of anxiety.

Remodeling projects also involve a lot of decisions—many of them permanent. Decisions a homeowner will need to live with and look at every day for a long time. In addition, countless hours watching HGTV and scrolling through Pinterest and Houzz may put some unrealistic expectations and ideas in their heads.

Recognizing the thoughts and emotions your potential client might be having can help point you to questions and situations you should address from the start. The next step is to get out in front of potential pitfalls with proactive communication.

ASK THE THREE BIG QUESTIONS

Initial conversations become more productive when you start out by asking three standard questions:

QUESTION 1:

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO DO?

This is obvious, but it helps to have the prospective client describe to you in as much detail as possible the changes and improvements they hope to bring to their home. Step back and let them do the talking. What they say will start to reveal the scope of the project, their desires and expectations, and, crucially, whether this job and customer are a good fit for you.

QUESTION 2:

WHEN DO YOU WANT TO DO YOUR REMODEL?

Their answer lets you know how serious and realistic they are about remodeling their home and if what they want fits into your schedule and what you do. Are they getting bids for a project they might do some time in the future? Then you might not need to put as much effort into a proposal. Do they need to have their new kitchen complete by next month? You can see trouble written all over that one.

QUESTION 3:

WHAT IS YOUR BUDGET?

This is the big question that determines everything else. If they have a reasonable budget for the project, congratulations—you're good to go. However, their answer is most likely some version of, "I'm not sure, what do you think it will cost?" Read on for an approach for getting customers to determine what their budget is.

OFFER A RANGE OF OPTIONS

It takes a little extra preparation, but a very effective technique for guiding homeowners to a workable budget number is to present your proposal with three budget ranges. For best results, present them in this order:

1ST

MIDRANGE OPTION:

Establish the baseline for the project with reasonable options that meet the specifications of the renovation they described for you. This is probably close to your standard estimate.

2ND

HIGHER-RANGE OPTION:

Bring in additional options, higher-end finishes, and upgrades to what you outlined in the midrange proposal.

3RD

LOWER-RANGE OPTION:

Offer a proposal with substitutions to the midrange proposal and remove some options to arrive at a lower budget number.

Giving homeowners a range of options in this way helps lessen sticker shock and allows them to bring themselves around to a budget that feels right to them. Most customers appreciate having the choice whether to add or subtract from the reasonable, midrange proposal. In addition, establishing from the start that upgrades and add-ons increase costs helps avoid the need to point that out down the road. Now, for example, when they decide that French doors to the patio are a must-have item, they already know that choice means they'll need to increase their budget.

EXPLAIN HOW YOU WORK

Most homeowners haven't done a remodel before, and many that have didn't have a great experience. You can put them at ease by letting them know what they can expect at each stage. Give them the straight story, too. There will be dust and noise and parts of the house they can't use and maybe an unexpected surprise. That reality isn't often reflected on renovation shows.

Next, walk them through your process so they can see how you handle remodel projects—step-by-step. Your BFS rep is also ready to help you explain things and go over options they have available in their budget range.



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- Discuss product features, benefits, pros, and cons with BFS experts
- Accelerate client decision-making
- Discover new products and solutions

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SET THE RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

One other practice that will help you eliminate confusion and misunderstandings is to lay out the expectations and ground rules that both you and your client will follow through the project. Customize your list to how you work. Here are some solid ideas to start with:

PROJECT UPDATES:

How frequently you will provide info on work progress

POINT OF CONTACT:

Who on your team they should speak to with problems or questions

WRITTEN AGREEMENTS:

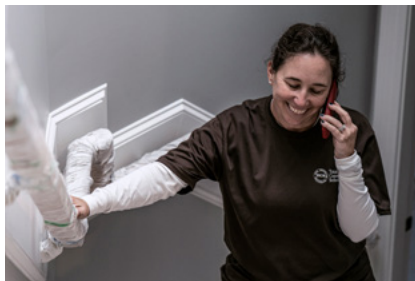
The statement of work, decisions, and change orders should all be documented in writing

COMMUNICATION METHODS:

How you will provide updates (phone, text, email, video call, or in person)

EXPECTATIONS OF THE HOMEOWNER:

Timeliness of decisions, responses, and payment schedule



"We pride ourselves on communication," explains Barbara Eagles. "We talk to our clients every day, whether it's via text or group text with my project managers, or I'll call them for an update on how their project is progressing. If there's something back-ordered or something came in damaged, that is the real world. They might not like hearing it, but they appreciate knowing."



PUT IT ALL TOGETHER

Much of being a successful professional remodeler is about managing chaos. Adopting proactive communication practices like these helps you gain clarity and sidestep avoidable misunderstandings on the path to more profitable projects and rave client reviews. And, as always, know that you can count on BFS Pro Remodel Services to help you with your remodeling projects every step of the way.

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