

What stays, what goes

Contributed by Master Admin
Thursday, 26 April 2007
Last Updated Thursday, 26 April 2007

Everything but the kitchen sink: What stays, what goes. The importance of a contract.

Back in the old days, most deals were sealed with the contractor's word and a handshake. Back then contractors seemed to be fairly honest and hardworking with the customer's satisfaction in mind. In today's world, where there are contractors out there who take advantage of what customers they can, or just simply fraudulent contractors wanting the money up front and then never seeing them again. The significance of having all agreements in writing is so important, the verbal contract has become obsolete. There are too many contractors out there that hear one thing while the customer is explaining something completely different.

All agreements should be drawn up in the form of a contract and signed by both parties, the contractor and the customer. Without a contract, if any defaults are declared, like work unfinished, work done poorly or not at all, nothing can be presented in the court of law besides he said/she said. The contractor's words and the customer's words mean nothing unless it is all in a written contract.

As the customer, you can visualize exactly what you want your kitchen to look like, but contractors can not read minds and share your visualization. You as the customer must get together with the contractors and list the details in writing of what work should be done. From listing what items will stay and what items will go, to listing who will be responsible to hauling away the debris. Always be as specific as possible in the written contract, listing all the details of how you want the work to be done and what should be the outcome.

Before entering into any contract for home improvements or home repair, there are two steps that should be completed: Scope and Specs. Scope out the work in writing and write a detailed list of specifications. These two should be recorded in detail prior to speaking with a contractor. This will help the customer get a better idea about the amount of work involved in a particular home improvement or home repair project.

As the customer approaches the contractor with these recorded details in hand, it will be easier to show the contractor what they need or expect more quickly. This will also be an easy starting point to discuss the project at hand and so that the project can become more visible to the contractor. For any home improvement or home repair projects that may be complicated, most contractors may have comments or questions as they look over the proposal. Working together, the proposal may have to be edited or re-written as the terms, conditions and procedures may need to be negotiated before the contract is complete and ready for both parties to sign.

Keep in mind that there are no free estimates or any kind of free labor for that matter. Many companies or independent contractors may advertise free estimates or free labor as a way to attract business. There are no freebies, only estimates and labor fees that are not billed directly as such. Most of the so called free estimates and labor have fees worked into the costs of other work that is done. This way the customer is none the wiser.

Each time a home improvement project or a home repair project is under contract, most customers end up paying a portion of the overhead of the company or person doing the work. That overhead involves everything from the time the contractor spends looking at other possible projects in the house to preparing the actual estimate. Most estimates have some additional amount added in to cover any contingencies, if and when they occur. The better organized and knowledgeable the customer is about the project, the less likely it will be for those contingencies to come up.

Customers should refrain from asking the contractor about the hidden fee's or contingencies that are figured into the total cost of the contract. This isn't something that a customer can ask the contractor directly and expect an honest response, but the customer may choose to save a fair amount of money while completing any home improvement or home repair project by spending a little time on it first.