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WORKING WITH YOUR CONTRACTOR

Effective communications by you and your contractor can be the corner stone of a successful remodeling project. The fact is remodeling projects are challenging to the Homeowners and the Contractor under the best of circumstances.

The first step for opening and fostering positive lines of communication that you should consider is the contractor's wish list. With this initial step, the goals in mind would be to make the contractor/homeowner relationship run as smoothly as possible and for you to get the remodeling project you've always wanted.

Start an 'idea book', even if it's a picture of something totally outrageous. It will give everyone a starting point for discussion. Pictures of things you don't want are as important as those you do: a specific shade of yellow or shape of a window, for example.

Have a budget in mind, and be willing to share it! Money is the hardest thing for clients to talk about, but it's one of the most important parameters of any job. Don't overestimate the amount of money available for the work you want done. Be honest and up front. A good rule-of-thumb measurement when it comes to estimating the dollar figure of an addition to an existing home or remodeling a specific space is about \$125 to \$150 a square foot. Specific costs will depend, of course, on the scope of the job and materials used. Remodeling which involves kitchen and bathrooms should be budgeted at a higher cost per square foot.

Be open to change. Remodeling projects - like true love - never run smoothly. Adjustments often need to be made, re-designs are sometime necessary, and some products may no longer be available. Being flexible will help bring about the best solutions to the problem.

Make a list of priorities. What must the space have? What's the most important? Determine this and share the information so that everyone will know what matters most. When and if corners have to be cut, no one will be surprised.

Do your homework. Know the terms professionals are using. A "whatchamacallit" is NOT a professional term. Learn what certain products can and cannot do, it'll save a lot of time and on-site discussion later. Conversely, don't be afraid to ask questions about things you don't know. Contractors are the professionals after all, and should be more than willing to explain construction methods or product choices to your satisfaction.

Consider yourself part of the team. Cooperation is the key to any successful venture - especially one that involves as many people as remodeling and renovation of a home.

Dan Ryan, of Dan Ryan Builders and past president of Frederick County Builders Association, offers the following suggestions.

Drive through a community and look at home/additions under construction. Buyers today have to be more knowledgeable about the contractor. Walk through homes under construction.

Check on the financial stability of the builder with the local builders/contractors associations (National Association of the Remodeling Industry - NARI), the Better Business Bureau, or ask the builder himself. 95% of the builders/contractors go out of business during the first five years. Ask how long the contractor has been in business. More home building/remodeling contracting businesses go out of business than any other line of business, except restaurants. It pays to check ahead on the reputation of the builder.

Do research up front and be comfortable with the selections and choices before the project begins, then let the contractors do their work.

While starting your project with this contractor's wish list will not assure you of a problem free project, it will go a long way in building a strong relationship which will see the project through to completion.