

DIY or DIR...You Get What You Pay For

DIY (Do-It-Yourself) and DIR (Do-It –Right) are not always synonymous. These days Do-It-Yourself is everywhere and it is made to sound like anyone can handle any project. Whether it is due to the tightening economy, shortage of contractors wrapped up with the recent wind storm repairs or just the feeling that it can not be that difficult, many more people are trying to tackle projects themselves instead of getting a professional involved. If you are so inclined to go it alone and do it yourself, here are a few elements to consider before jumping in to the task.

First of all ask yourself – do you have the necessary time to complete the project within the targeted time frame? Many DIY projects take significantly longer for someone not having experience. What is the value of your free time? What impact will taking twice as long to complete the project have on you and your family? Many DIY remodel projects go on for months occupying every available free evening and weekend. Some never get completed.

Second point to consider – do you have the necessary skills to complete the task with the expected level of quality? The book or the video may make installing tile or finishing drywall look simple until you try to mix the thinset (tile mortar) to the correct consistency or attempt to mud and tape drywall joints. Poor quality work can decrease the value of your home or at a minimum cause a potential buyer to question the construction quality.

Third item deals with tools. Do you have the right tools and equipment to do the job with high quality? Professional power tools and specialty tools can be very expensive when purchased for a one time job. Many times, good quality tools designed for the work make the job much easier and results in a better finished product.

The last and most important consideration deals with safety for your home and yourself. Are you knowledgeable of the required safety and building codes for your project? This is particularly important if your project involves electrical or plumbing modifications. Other code violations like stair riser heights or light fixtures in closets can come back to haunt you later when you decide to sell your home and the inspection identifies some of these outages. The other risk is if someone gets hurt due to your modifications not being to code.

So is it really less expensive to do it yourself? Probably if you have the necessary tools, some experience with the work you are about to tackle and knowledge of building codes. It really comes down to the value of your free time in this case. If you don't have some experience and tools, it can cost you well beyond your planned budget investing in tools and/or either re-doing items that did not turn out as expected or having to bring in a professional later to rework or fix the project. You are essentially paying double in this case since they will most likely re-do a lot of what you have done plus the time and money you have already invested in your attempt.

Professional craftsmen have typically invested in the proper tools and equipment to do a job efficiently and with good quality. They expect to recoup that investment over years of using the equipment. Just as with good tools and equipment, the same goes for the professional contractors that you select. Many people go looking for the best deal, aka lowest price. As with most things in life, you get what you pay for. Finding quality, reliable, insured contractors can be a time consuming task but a worthwhile one to put significant effort into to make your project proceed smoothly.

The task can be more difficult in the coming months with the tightening economy as many contractors offer special deals to get work to stay in business undercutting other bids to survive. Playing one bid against another can be risky. You may feel great that you negotiated a lower price, but if the contractor is barely breaking even or losing money on the job they may disappear before the work is complete or take shortcuts that you may not be aware of until later. They may also go out of business in the middle of or after finishing your work with no recourse for problems identified later. A contractor that has been in business for a while and is reputable will not accept work where he knows he can not make any money. They typically walk away from the job when the game of playing one bid against another begins.

Selecting a contractor based solely on price usually results in a bad experience. Make sure the scope of the work and what you expect is well defined and in writing. This alone will not protect you from a less than capable contractor so make sure you check out some of their prior work similar to your project needs and talk with some prior clients. The other key point is to make sure they are insured which requires more than just asking to see their certificate. This may seem like a lot of work and the project has not even started but this is necessary to increase the probability of a successful project.

Knowing that all of this work needs to be covered does not need to scare you away from your pet project. There is a service right here in our area that does a lot of the leg work for finding good contractors for people, HomeServicesLink. We check out their insurance, their quality, their reliability and continue to track the performance from job to job making sure it stays up to our standards to remain in the preferred provider network. Many times these are smaller contractors, not the big names you see on television or with big ads in magazines. These smaller companies typically have lower overheads and thus can be more competitive when bidding your project usually with the business owner present on the job and doing the work.