

SPEAK UP

Communication during your remodeling project -- Part One

The closing days of your remodeling project can be pretty hectic. There is just a lot going on, and you are being bombarded with detailed decisions to make. The "prize," which is getting every last detail done, sometimes seems further away every day.

I remember such a day in our last remodeling project, which was during an especially hectic period. We had a plumber installing the toilet in our master bath. Suddenly, he looked up, glared at me, and gruffly said, "Now, you're not one of those people who are going to ask me to use brass fittings for the water stop are you?" It seemed he ended his phrase with a growl beneath his breath. With all the other things going on, and with the sudden realization of just how important that plumber's work was to the other trades people who needed to be working in the same space within hours, I paused before answering.

Sensing he had me on the defensive he added, "Of course, I don't carry those brass fittings. We will have to special order them, and that will delay this project by at least a week." Then he looked at me, somehow knowing he was going to get exactly the answer he hoped for. I ran through a rationalization process, telling myself that no one would really notice that angle stop, even though everything else in the bathroom was brass. Taking a deep breath, I said, "Go ahead with what you've got."

Two weeks later, I found myself in the bathroom replacing that stupid and obviously out of place chrome angle stop at my own cost, and with my own hands - even though my project plans had called for brass angle stops. Now I was doing the muttering under my breath -- but I had no one to blame for the extra work but myself. In the course of my work as a professional Architect, I'm speaking out, strongly at times, on job sites almost every day. Here, though, on my own house, I

found myself in the same position as most of you. I was a home owner having to weigh all the factors: time, cost, and money, with seemingly only minutes to decide. Sometimes speaking out is difficult to do.

I suppose there are some of us who have the presence of mind, composure, and a definite sense of where they are going who can speak out concisely and clearly whenever circumstances demand it. I actually found that speaking up is much easier for me to do when I am acting as the Architect on someone else's project than it is for me when dealing with my own home. In fact, one of the key roles an Architect/Designer can play on a project is as a communicator. "Wait a minute!" you might be saying, "The Contractor is working for me. I am paying the bills, and things are clearly spelled out in the plans and specifications. I shouldn't have any problem speaking up."

Actually, if you have been in the middle of a remodeling project, you know that there are many times when it is easier to let someone else speak up, especially if you have already been speaking up about a lot of other things. You definitely don't want to get characterized in the Contractor's eyes as a "picky customer". That's when the Contractor starts to mentally put you in a category where it becomes easier for him to dismiss your concerns as unrealistic and unreasonable.

The Designer/Architect, however, is removed from the intense emotional aspects that a project can have for the home owner. After all - it's your bathroom. You'll be seeing it every day for years and years. A tiny flaw over time can be magnified in your eyes until eventually, when you walk into that room, it is all that you'll see. It will end up overshadowing the other 99% of the project that turned out perfectly.

It is definitely much easier for an Architect or Designer to approach the Contractor about those small detail issues that can mean all the world to you, but might not appear to amount to much to a casual observer. Your spokesperson can keep the contractor in contact with the overall framework of the job, and can also offer specific directions or ideas to resolving your concerns them in a way that is easier on the Contractor's schedule and budget.

Join me next time as I share a few other observations about Speaking Out!

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