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TIPS FOR SELECTING A CONTRACTOR

When the time comes to improve your home it's important to remember one thing, **"not all home improvement contractors are alike"**. Here are some tips to help you make the right decision.

1. Ask friends, family and neighbours for the names of contractors they have used and would recommend.
2. Look for a well established company that stands behind their workmanship. Don't be misled by slogans like "twenty years of experience". Find out "what year" the company was established. You're best dealing with a company that doesn't try to mislead you into thinking they have been in business much longer than they actually have.
3. Avoid fly-by-night contractors. Make sure the contractor has a permanent "business" address and telephone number (not just a cell number). It's also recommended that you visit the contractor's place of business, or at least view it on Google Maps. You would be surprised at how many contractors promote how large they are, yet they work from home and don't even have a business establishment. Typically contractors who have been successful enough to own an actual business establishment, have a greater chance of being around in the future.
4. Get detailed estimates in writing from at least two or three contractors and never pay for an estimate.
5. Check the contractor's record with the Better Business Bureau.
6. Make sure the contractor carries public liability, property damage and WSIB insurance. Get this in writing and call to verify that the policies are in force.
7. Ask the contractors for customer references and visit some completed jobs. Find out if the contractor performed as promised.
8. Make sure the contractor offers written warranties for both material and workmanship. You should be confident that the contractor will be in business in the future, if not the workmanship warranty (no matter how inflated), is worthless.
9. Compare the materials quoted. Not all materials or warranties are alike.
10. The best contractors are only as good as their installers. Insist on having trained experienced craftsmen work on your home. When possible, factory certified installers are recommended and these contractors can typically offer you enhanced warranty coverage.
11. How accessible is the owner? Having direct contact with the owner or President, especially if it's a large company, gives you the peace of mind in knowing you can always contact the person in charge.
12. Never put down a deposit of more than 10% of the total cost of the job. Preferably, deal with a contractor that doesn't require a deposit. You don't want someone running their business with your money.
13. Never make a verbal agreement with a contractor, always get everything in writing.
14. Be wary of contractors with low bids. They may cut corners in order to make a profit, they may not have complete insurance coverage, they may not employ enough skilled labour, or they simply may not understand (or care) what is involved in doing the job right. Remember, "the bitterness of poor quality lingers long after the sweetness of a cheap price is forgotten".
15. Make sure the contractors are committed to ongoing training and education. The home improvement industry offers a wide variety of training and educational programs that professional contractors will have attended.
16. Don't rush your decision to select a contractor. You are going to live with the work for years and maybe even decades, so taking the time to select the right contractor is very important. If needed, oftentimes free temporary repairs can be done to protect your home until the work is scheduled. It's best to do as much research as possible to prevent yourself a lot of frustration later.
17. If a contractor suggests you do this research and use a considerable amount of scrutiny when selecting a contractor, this indicates he/she is looking after your best interests and also feels confident that his/her name and reputation will stand up well in the process.