

Do It Right the First Time

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During his 20 years in remodeling, Rob Mathews, CR, CGR, president of Curb Appeal Renovations, Keller, Texas, hasn't seen many construction issues that have surprised him, but he still encounters situations that anger him. "I can get pretty upset when I see people taking advantage of a situation," he says. "I was in the Marine Corps and the nursing field, and in those two fields the idea is to do it right the first time. I follow that in life."

To support his belief system, Mathews created a 10-page pre-construction checklist that helps him assess a property and determine whether a project can begin as planned or whether additional work is necessary to ensure the project his team builds will last and look its best. The checklist includes a thorough examination of the structure, inside and out, as well as electrical and safety issues, and even requires information that pertains directly to the homeowner, such as allergies or veterinary contacts in case a pet gets sick and the homeowner can't be reached.

Once Mathews' client signs a design agreement, Mathews goes to the home to take measurements and begins following his checklist. "I'll probably spend half a day taking all the measurements, photographs and video."

Mathews follows the checklist even when an area of the home does not directly affect the project his team will complete because sharing the situation with the homeowner builds trust. "We may be doing a kitchen remodel, and I get up into the attic and notice there's a broken rafter or they have minimal insulation. I bring this up to them so they're advised of it and can make a decision about whether to correct it," he says. Mathews adds homeowners typically have the discovered defects repaired.

The checklist also helps Mathews provide a thorough proposal for the homeowner. For example, today's cooktops and ovens require additional power, and Mathews' crew often has to run a new wire to supply that power. "Sometimes it's a little tricky to get the new wire from the electrical panel in the garage all the way to the kitchen," he says. "You could run it through the attic but a lot of our houses have two stories, so you have to determine whether to go around the house underground or through the soffits or somewhere else. These are things that are going to take time and energy and, in the long run, cost you and your homeowner money."

Mathews' assessments not only help improve his clients' homes and assist him in creating thorough proposals, but they also protect his team. For example, if Mathews finds a damaged attic ladder or problems with another component his crew will use, he ensures it is fixed before work begins.

There are occasions in which Mathews requires a more in-depth investigation. In those instances he works with Tom Graham, P.E., a forensic engineer with Noakes Engineering Co., Arlington, Texas. In fact, Graham currently is determining how to support a sinking home addition Mathews discovered while using a laser to lay out new kitchen cabinetry. "About 8 feet or so from the outside wall, the floor and ceiling drop 2 inches. To make the base cabinets level they would be off the ground 2 inches," Mathews asserts. "By really looking at the structure of the home, you may find serious humps or a wall that has a big bow in it that will affect your project."

Mathews credits his many years of construction experience and his professional certifications with helping him identify construction defects. "I would say my Certified Remodeler designation especially helped because it is an in-depth course with an in-depth exam, covering everything from the foundation all the way to the roof and everything in between."

Mathews' dedication to his craft has elevated him to NARI Fort Worth president, and he has built a reputation in the area for assessing homes and being honest with homeowners. In fact, a prospect whom Mathews told not to remodel the home he wanted to sell (based on the cost of the remodel compared to the home's worth) was so happy with Mathews' honest advice he has asked Mathews to assess his new house, which is currently being built. "We look out for the homeowner as much as we can," Mathews says. "This really pays off because a majority of our business is from referrals and past clients."

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