

MERRILL CONTRACTING & REMODELING'S

10 Tips for a Successful Remodeling Project





What is a successful remodel?

Merrill Contracting & Remodeling defines a successful remodeling project as one in which:

☒ **We meet or exceed your expectations**

plus

☒ **You had a positive remodeling experience and liked working with us**

Please spend a few minutes reviewing these 10 helpful tips about remodeling. They can help assure your remodeling project is a complete and total success, as we are sure you desire.

1. **CREATE A LIST OF WHY YOU ARE REMODELING:**

Write down the reasons you want to remodel. Don't forget to include what you do not like about your home as it is now.

Include the things your home needs in order to be the way you want it to be and to allow you to do the things you want to do.

Describe what you have in mind, what should be included in your remodel, what you would like it to do for you, and how it will look. And lastly, share your list with us.

2. **SET "PROJECT PRIORITIES" FOR YOUR REMODEL:**

Once you decide to remodel, make sure to prioritize the various parts and aspects of your project. An easy way is to create three "buckets." These are:

- "I **NEED** to have." This bucket contains your highest priorities.
- "I **WANT** to have." This bucket contains things about your project you really want, but you can live without some or all if your budget is really tight.
- "I **WISH** to have." This last bucket includes things about your remodel that would be nice to include, but you can

easily live without and you may not wish to spend more for.

3. **ESTABLISH PRIORITIES OF WHAT YOU WANT IN YOUR**

“REMODELER”:

Prioritize what you want in, and from, your project’s remodeler.

Remodelers are not all the same, and they will not deliver the same final result or provide you with the same remodeling experience.

Select a remodeler based on the type of business they are and what they can provide such as: Are they run in a professional manner? Are they licensed and insured? Do they provide the quality of design, construction, and customer service you desire? What are their expertise and reputation? Can they can complete the project by the date you need it finished, at a cost you feel is fair? Can they provide you a fixed price or only an estimate?

A requirement for a smooth-running and less stressful project is **Good-to-Great Communications** between you and your selected remodeling contractor. This includes all types of communication such as written project descriptions, material selection lists, memos, letters, emails, and texts. It also includes verbal

communications. Another aspect is, do they communicate the way you feel comfortable? If you prefer texting, do they always email you? If you prefer emails do they call you? Do they email or text you when a call would be better?

Are they good at listening? Do they understand what you mean to communicate? Do they ask good questions? How clear are they when they communicate, and do they take the time to explain things you do not or may not understand or that you have questions about?

Are they clear, concise and include all the important details when they communicate?

Are they timely with their communications? How long does it take for them to respond? Do you have to call them because they take so long to get back to you?

Note: We only emphasize communications so much because it is a critical priority that is not often considered. Moreover, we know that poor communications can cause remodeling projects to become nightmares.

Determine which of these things and/or others are the most important to you when deciding on your project's remodeler.

4. **SET THREE BUDGET TARGETS:**

Decide what you feel is a good budget level for:

a) **What you WOULD LIKE to invest**

This is the amount you would like to invest in your project.

Remember, however, that unless you know what remodeling projects cost, it may or may not be a realistic budget for the project you are considering.

b) **What you CAN AFFORD to invest**

This is the uppermost limit you can afford to spend, no matter what. It is usually a good idea to assume that a project may cost 10% – 20% more than estimated for things neither you nor your remodeler can foresee. Why? Because even with the best-planned and best-managed projects, it is not uncommon for something to come up that was not in the budget. You may decide you want to change something or the remodeler may find a hidden defect inside a wall that needs fixing that would not be in their estimate or fixed price.

c) **What you ARE WILLING to invest in your project**

Most homeowners end up here. You would, naturally, like to spend less. Perhaps less than a project could realistically cost. You may be willing to spend more than you would *like* to if it means you can accomplish more of what you *need, want* or *wish* to have.

SHARE YOUR BUDGETS WITH YOUR REMODELER: Many homeowners feel uneasy letting their remodelers know what they want, are willing to and can spend on their project. If you select a reputable remodeler, one you trust, providing your budget information along with your need, want, and wish priorities, actually works in your favor. It allows your remodeler to help you get the most of what you want within your budget.

5. **PRIORITIZE: PRICE, COST, QUALITY, and VALUE**

When prioritizing what you want in your project and what you are willing to spend, it is important for you to understand what we specifically mean by Price, Cost, Quality, and Value.

- a) **Price** is what you pay your contractor. It may or may not be the price shown in the project's proposal. It is the "final price" or

total amount you have paid your remodeler by the time the project is completed, and you are “paid in full.”

b) **Cost** includes the “Price,” but it also includes more:

- Any other of your costs, such as the extra time you need to spend with them dealing with issues, stress, and headaches.
- Payments you make to others if there are problems on the job, or your remodeler does not provide something you understood was included in the project Price.
- The money you spend on renting a place to stay if you cannot live in your home during the remodeling project, especially if your project runs long.
- The other inconveniences to you and your family during the project and especially if the project runs longer than planned.
- Ownership costs for the project that factor into the mid- and long-term costs of your remodel. These include costs for extra maintenance of your home, replacement costs of

systems and materials that break or wear out prematurely, and so on.

The upfront Price is usually higher if you pay for higher quality materials, systems, craftsmanship, and better client service. However, higher quality in these areas almost always means you will incur lower maintenance costs, and the materials, systems, and construction lasts longer, so you save on replacement expenses. You will also save time and trouble by not having to deal with problems that come with poor quality and poor service.

As you can clearly see, the “Cost” of your remodel *does not end when you pay your remodeler the final price*. Or even when you account for the extra Costs during the project. Lower quality craftsmanship, materials, and products almost always cost you more later because of additional repairs and early replacement. These avoidable Cost of Ownership expenses, while hard to pin down in advance, should nevertheless be factored into your project’s overall cost.

Since you can recover costs when you sell, another element in your consideration of the cost of your project may be how much of your project's costs you will be able to recoup when you sell your home. Many things impact resale value, however, and it is typically hard to factor what you will recoup into project's total cost until you sell.

c) **Quality** includes:

- First, there is your remodeling project itself, its design quality, quality of the materials and craftsmanship, the enhanced functionality and lower maintenance and replacement costs.
- Plus, quality includes the added utility, enjoyment and use you get from your remodeled home. While hard to convert to dollars, **these are the real reasons most people remodel.**
- Improved saleability and resale value when you sell is often a benefit of higher quality. It is also a factor in the cost of your project.

d) **Value** is the relationship between your project's various costs and what you get back in return from the project, starting from the time of completion and for the entire time you own your home. Value includes the utility and enjoyment you get, which are often increased by quality.

Regardless of what a project costs, **most homeowners want to get no less than a "fair value"** in return, if not more, for their investment. A low-cost project can be a poor value. A high-cost project could provide you with excellent value because of the quality of materials and a design that better suits your lifestyle. However, the opposite could also be true. This is why your choice of remodeler is so critical.

Note: Every remodeling project has a Price and Cost. Quality of your project impacts both. Low quality generally means a lower proposal price but often increases the project's costs. Both cost and quality impact value.

6. **CREATE A LIST OF FUNCTIONAL NEEDS AND USERS:**

In addition to the priorities of what you need, want, and wish, you also will benefit from listing any functional requirements for your project. And who will be living in the home, including their ages

and if there are any special adaptations or design features needed for someone with mobility issues. Share this information with your remodeler.

- a) What functional requirements do you have for the remodeled space? This includes storage needs, appliance preferences, lighting needs, walk-in tubs, curbless showers, and furniture functionality.
- b) Does anyone living in your home now, or for as long as you plan to live in the home, need the remodeling to be child-safe, ADA-compliant, or designed for older homeowners or people with flexibility, mobility, height, strength, balance, vision or other special needs?

7. **ASSEMBLE AND PRESENT YOUR DESIGN IDEAS:**

Your remodeler may provide excellent design services, such as we do, or they may do little more than take your thoughts and create plans, but add none of their own ideas.

In all cases, you need to communicate your thoughts, ideas, preferences in design styles, likes, dislikes, and expectations to your remodeler.

Some homeowners like to use Pinterest or Houzz to create a design board for their remodeling project. One they can share with their remodeler. A picture is worth a 1,000 words. Sometimes more.

8. **THINK INTO THE FUTURE, NOT JUST FOR TODAY:**

If you plan to live in your home for more than a few years, you should think about how your needs may change and what they might be in the future. For example:

- a) If you have a new baby, you may want to plan space for a safe and secure playroom.
- b) If you are in your late 40s or 50s and have kids, you may want to envision what you would want to change in your home when you are an empty-nester. What will you do with those spare bedrooms for example?
- c) Thinking further ahead into retirement, you may want to consider installing a barrier-free shower, fewer steps, or a main-floor master suite today or allowing for it to be built in the future.

You do not need to include these things into your home's remodeling project now unless you wish to. However, if you plan your current remodel in a way that considers your needs in the future, you can remodel your home today in a way that would allow you to make those changes later easily and less expensively.

Sharing this information with your remodeler now will help them design and remodel your home so that it is best for your current and long-term needs.

9. **RESEARCH AND VET YOUR REMODELER:**

Easily the most important decision you make that determines the success of your remodeling project, and your remodeling experience, is the remodeling contractor you select.

Make sure you have established your Remodeler Priorities (see number 3) before selecting your remodeling contractor.

You should only select a remodeler that:

- a) Is a licensed business in your state and is licensed for the type of work they will be doing.
- b) Is appropriately insured with general business and liability insurance at suitable levels AND who carries Workers Compensation insurance for their employees.
- c) Uses subcontractors that carry the same types of insurance as the remodeler or that are covered under the remodeler's policy.
- d) Uses licensed trades when licensing is required for that trade, as it is for electrical work, plumbing, engineering, and architecture.
- e) Always pulls all building permits in the contractor's name and not yours.
- f) Always has their work inspected by the appropriate building inspectors as called for by law.
- g) Is a financially viable business.

- h) Has excellent references you can talk with.
- i) Has an informative, quality website or another site that shows their work, and it is the quality and price range you want.
- j) Has a good record with the Better Business Bureau.
- k) Has good client ratings online. And/or uses an independent 3rd party service to get honest feedback from their clients and to continually improve their processes.
- l) Writes clear, understandable and detailed proposals with costs for projects.
- m) Has good communications with you, because communications from start to end will be key to a smooth-running project.
- n) Has a staff and team that you feel comfortable being in your home even when you are not.
- o) Is a current member in good standing with a trade organization such as **NARI**, *National Association of the Remodeling Industry*,

and follows the organization's code of ethics and business practices.

- p) Is willing to answer questions about any issue that may concern you.

10. ALL PARTIES NEED TO BE FLEXIBLE AND REASONABLE:

This means both you and your remodeler. If you selected your remodeler with care, they would be a business that is flexible when it can be and is always reasonable in dealing with you.

Moreover, in fairness and for the project to run smoothly, you must reciprocate.

- a) For example, you may want your remodeler to be flexible enough to make certain reasonable changes as the project progresses. Your remodeler will want you to be reasonable and flexible if that change means the cost of your project changes, or the schedule is delayed.
- b) Sometimes even a change of one material to a similarly priced material later in the project can add a fair amount of time and some extra costs. Time to cancel one order, place a new one, possibly return materials delivered, probably require a special



delivery or shipment, perhaps a change in schedules, extra time with the field team communicating the change, etc.

- c) Mutual flexibility will go a long way in making your remodeling project run more smoothly, be less stressful, and be more enjoyable. Additionally, a reputable remodeler who has a reasonable and flexible client is more likely to go out of their way to satisfy that client.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss a project you have in mind, please contact us for a free project consultation.



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