



Communication: The Key To Success When Building a New Home

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Communication is very important in our daily lives. Whether it's talking to our significant other, texting our children, phoning our parents, e-mailing our business associates, or mailing a letter to our congressman, it's vital for humans to communicate to maintain relationships and make progress.

During a huge undertaking such as building your dream home, communication is the key to completing the project in a timely manner with everyone's expectations being met.

It is vital that communications between you and your homebuilder remain strong during the entire process.

It should be established in your initial meetings the best means of communication for both of you. Some builders spell it out in their marketing brochures with a process such as this: "You will be in touch with us several times a week, either via email or phone, or at times, at the jobsite, whichever works best for your lifestyle. At these times we will give you heads up as to progress and keep you abreast of what is forthcoming. We will have walkthroughs periodically with you as well. These will occur towards the end of framing and onset of mechanical installation, at the end of drywall so we can meet with our carpenters on trim, and during the last month on punch list items."

The exact wording of the communications plan isn't as important as making sure you have a mutually acceptable communications plan that will work for you and your homebuilder.

It is best that a regular schedule of meetings, discussions or e-mail is established during the building process. Occasionally, reasons for impromptu meetings or discussions will arise and changing the schedule can't be avoided. Working with your homebuilder as a teammate with the mutual goal of completing the home in a timely manner and to everyone's expectation is very worthwhile.

Flexibility is another key to a successful relationship with your homebuilder, along with early recognition the construction of a new home often depends on factors that neither the builder nor customer can control.

Take construction scheduling, for example, often a source of frustration for homebuyers. They sign a contract with the builder; the builders says there should be "no problem" in finishing the home within a specific period of time; and then a number of factors conspire to delay the process by 60-90 days.

In the meantime, the buyers have sold their existing home; the kids are scheduled to begin school in a new district but are not yet living in it; and Mom, Dad and the kids have to either store all of their possessions and live with friends or relatives or take a short-term lease and cram themselves into an apartment or rental home.

Very stressful, to say the least. Families caught in this kind of bind are not happy campers, and the builder usually finds himself at the receiving end of that unhappiness.

But if one takes a look at the facts underneath this kind of scenario, there often is no one to blame but the whims of Mother Nature and the difficulties inherent in buyer decision-making.

Weather is generally not covered in sales contracts, but it remains an important factor, and builders universally find themselves at its mercy. In a few of the past Homearamas, for example, many of the Dayton region's very best builders were unable to finish their homes by show's original start date. An incredibly wet and early winter made it virtually impossible to get into the ground and, if you can't dig, you can't build.

Even something as comparatively simple as the selection of fixtures can grind the construction process to a dead halt. If the homebuyer can't reach a final decision, walls can't get closed in, tile can't get installed, and tops can't be set. More important,

once this scenario evolves, subs have to be pulled off your job to work on others, and you could find yourself at the end of a long line in terms of getting them back.

Change orders and material shortages can also affect the construction process.

Home building is a very precise science within a very imprecise environment. As a result, three pieces of advice come to mind.

First advice: the key is to maintain open lines of communication with your builder. Review the construction progress with him or her. If you authorize change orders, be certain you understand how they might affect your construction schedule.

Second advice: plan prudently. If you have ever tried to assemble a 10-speed bicycle on Christmas Eve, only to find that the instructions are in Taiwanese, you know the consequences of poor planning.

If you are building a 3,000 square foot home and need to be in it by the time school starts in September, don't make your purchase decision in March. Builders can theoretically deliver a house of this size in five months if absolutely everything falls into place but it almost never does.

Third advice: don't expect that the construction process is immune to the pitfalls, unforeseen circumstances and other challenges which accompany every human endeavor.