



America's Home Builders: A Quality Industry

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In this current buyer's market, builders are more cognizant than ever of the need to focus on customer service and quality workmanship. In the housing industry, a company's reputation is paramount and often based on word of mouth from customers, and publicly traded home builders answer to their stockholders as well. Consequently, it is not surprising that home builders everywhere are putting a premium on excellence in customer satisfaction and high-quality residential construction.

Builders Embrace Quality and Education

To ensure that customers have a smooth, positive experience with their new homes, builders are taking proactive steps to ensure the highest quality of service. Common procedures include improving quality control, preparing home owner manuals that guide buyers through the home building and purchase process, and continually striving to improve customer service. Additionally, recognizing that home building is a complex process, builders realize that they need to take consumer complaints seriously and have a process in place to handle them.

Industry emphasis on quality also extends to the job site, including sustained efforts to ensure that training and construction practices as well as customer service are of the highest caliber. To facilitate continuous progress in this area, the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) and the NAHB Research Center sponsor educational sessions on improving quality and maintaining good customer service at industry events held each year around the country.

Take An Active Role in Building Your Quality Home

In addition to all that the home building industry is doing to ensure that your new home is of the highest quality, consumers can contribute to making the purchase of a new home a positive experience.

First, choose your builder wisely — talk to friends and family that are happy with their homes and get the names of their builders. Consider driving around a residential area appealing to you and asking home owners about their builders. Find out if they are happy with the level of service they received, and the pros and cons of their overall experience.

When selecting a builder, it also pays to be aware of complications that may arise during the construction process, and to work closely with your builder to develop a contract that suits you both. A well-written contract helps prevent disputes from arising during and after construction because the parties have settled potentially troublesome matters, such as the scope of work, the materials to be used, and the time and method of payment, before the project begins.

However, even the most well-written contract is no substitute for ongoing communication between the buyer and builder during the project. Remember that your relationship with your builder will continue through the warranty period, so choose someone with whom you will be comfortable for the long term. It may be beneficial to maintain a journal of all conversations and correspondence. Most builders have a system in place to organize information regarding each customer and project.

You should expect to receive a copy of the builder's warranty when you receive the other contract documents. Make sure you understand what protection it offers and what kind of service you can expect after the sale. Typically, a builder makes two to three service calls during the first year after you move in to repair non-emergency problems covered by your warranty. The first call is usually 30 to 120 days after the move-in, and the second is around the eleventh month — right before any one-year warranties on workmanship and materials expire. For emergencies, many builders are able to send someone to your home right away.

Finally, look for a builder who belongs to a builders association or other professional group such as the Home Builders Association of Dayton.