



Important questions to ask your contractor during the initial meeting

- What is your availability?
- Are you insured? Does your insurance cover the entire project?
- What is your guarantee? Is it 1 year?
- What will be the pace of the project once it gets underway?
- How does your bidding and estimating process work? Do you provide competitive bids? (That means a bid up front before being hired, so that you may compare it with other bids.) Some very good contractors are in high enough demand that they do not bid competitively: they don't have the time for it, and often claim that they figure costs so thoroughly that their bids come back high simply because they are more accurate than their competition.
- Are your bids and contracts flat rate or a variation of cost-plus? Flat rate usually turns out in the contractor's favor, but you trade money savings for surety. Cost-plus is more variable, insofar as it is based on a mark-up of the materials you purchase; you'll have a much firmer sense of cost for a cost-plus contract if you've chosen all your materials up front.
- What is your batting average for bids - i.e., How often are you accurate? How often are you within 10%? How often are you under? (What? Is UNDER BUDGET possible? You don't know if you don't ask!)
- What are the biggest causes for a project going over (or under) budget?
- How and when will you let us know if we have gone over the bid estimate?
- Are you a problem solver? (Answer with examples please.)
- Will you take care of all permits? Are you up to speed on building codes for the area?
- How do you work with designers/architects?
- How will you communicate with us? Do you email/text/call?
- How do you communicate with your laborers and subcontractors?
- What time of day does work normally begin and end?
- Will you be working on Saturdays?
- Will your workers be here every day? If not, how and when will you let me know the days they will be here?
- Do you let your workers and subcontractors smoke on the job site?
- How do we commit/hire you? Do you have a contract?
- How does payment work?
- Are there discounts if we pay a certain way?
- What are your mark ups? (Especially ask about markup on cabinetry.)
- Will you be on site or a project manager? Who is the project manager? What's his/her experience? Do I get to pick him/her? Can you supply me with references of your clients who have had him/her as a project manager in the past?
- Who are your sub contractors, or are your plumber/electrician/HVAC/etc part of your firm?
- May I use my own plumber/electrician/etc.?