



TRENT HASTON

Be wary when you are being promised everything under the sun. When something seems too good to be true, remember, it usually is.

Quality is not a Commodity



Though a home is the largest investment for most American families, and a place where they spend most of their time, the industry of home construction often correlates with commodity pricing. We at Andrew Roby, Inc. feel so differently about the product we deliver. We offer our clients the best quality and experience, which is certainly not a commodity. When competing against commodity-minded firms, we find that potential clients are often sidetracked by the same false promises and pitfalls. Knowing these may save you a lot of grief.

The Allowance Game

In a fixed-cost bid estimate, ‘allowances’ are variables that can go up significantly or be removed completely. These are generally items that the homeowner or their design representative has the power to shop for and choose, such as tile, appliances, floor finishes, etc. The cost for each of these categories varies depending on demand, quality and style. Commodity contractors often try to win jobs by underestimating allowances. While the initial contract price seems appealing, this does not favor them when they realize too late that their allowances do not accommodate their quality and aesthetic standards.

Management Expectation and Delivery

When constructing your dream home, the “means” is as vital as the “end”. I know that if the experience is full of missed expectations, cost overruns, time delays and disputes, then the home is far from being a “dream home”. The intricate team and production layers that make the dream home a reality, costs more than just the materials it takes to build the house. We know from our over-63-year-experience that most large projects require a full-time site superintendent, who is skilled in quality construction, efficient processes and tactful management. We go up against many contractors that don’t have this skilled layer of management and during the sales process they convince the client that it isn’t necessary. Clients soon realize this falsehood when management is in disarray and materials are wrong due to sloppy ordering earlier in the project.

Schedule and Length of Job

It is easy to say that a 10-month project can be completed in six months - but the proof is in the planning. Do your research. Has the contractor completed a job schedule on paper that includes

critical path points that makes logical sense? Check references in relation to the contractor's performance against a pre-construction schedule. Does the contractor operate with deadlines, time terms and critical path experiences? We have lost many jobs because our competition said that they could knock months off our timeline, only for the homeowner to find out in the end it was an unrealistic timeframe and actually took months longer than our time-proven expectations.

Inferior Fixed-Cost Product Items

Have you ever closed a door and noticed it was solid and heavy, or thought the opposite on one that was flimsy, light and cheap? Doors are just one example where a commodity contractor can cut thousands of dollars from construction costs and the client not figure it out until it's too late. You may be expecting that nice heavy door, but end up getting the flimsy one. There are so many other items that fall into this cost-cutting category such as hardwood floors, trim materials, insulation, etc. We pride ourselves on up-front conversations on items like this, where the homeowners and we can work together to find the right mixes of quality and cost.

Company Financial Strength

The best contractors have a backbone of financial strength. Trades, subcontractors and vendors like to do business with contractors who pay invoices timely and proactively. This reflects in the fluidity of the construction process, job consistency and availability. Contractors that don't have financial strength and thus do not pay their business partners well, often cannot get them to respect their processes and show up on their project when needed. This leads to time delays, inferior quality and possibly an incom-

plete project ridden with mechanics liens. We have often provided our credit rating from Dunn and Bradstreet, credit references from our trade partners and even our 63-year balance sheet in effort to reassure our clients. I urge you to seek this knowledge when interviewing the contractor for your job.

My last words of advice: Be weary when you are being promised everything under the sun. When something seems too good to be true, remember, it usually is. ❖

Trent Haston is CEO of Andrew Roby and has spent many years in project management, focusing on style and craftsmanship for custom home projects. For more information call 704-334-5477 or visit www.andrewroby.com.

