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HOME SHOW



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GARY'S  
REMODELING  
CORNER



**Q: What is value engineering?**

**A:** Value engineering means looking for ways to lower project costs while keeping the features the homeowners really

## Better Than Bidding

*Identifying the best pro for your project starts by clarifying your wants and needs.*

Should you heed the conventional advice about getting price bids from three remodelers? Maybe, but once you understand the complexities and uncertainties that go into a bid, you will see why there may be a more effective approach.

The biggest concern with the three-bid method for choosing a remodeler is that each project is unique. Even a simple kitchen or bath remodel will include hundreds of parts and dozens of product options. That, along with the fact that existing conditions vary from house to house, makes it virtually impossible to ensure all bids are based on the same assumptions.

If you already have a set of plans and want apples-to-apples bids, those plans need to be excruciatingly detailed, including written specifications for each faucet, floor surface and doorknob. They'll also need realistic contingencies for hidden defects the remodeler might uncover after opening up a wall or floor.

Specs like that are rare, to say the least. To create an accurate bid of this scope, the remodeler would need to ask a ton of questions to flesh out the details. Then each remodeler will unintentionally lead you in a different direction because their business procedures and preferred products differ. And each remodeler will present its bid in a different format, making them hard to compare.

What if your plans for transforming your space were drawn by an architect? That seldom changes anything. Skilled architects and designers know how to turn your vision into an actual plan, but they often leave spec writing to the person most qualified for it: the remodeler.

If you are determined to get three bids, consider hiring a remodeler with experience in your type of project to detail the plans and specs--before sending them out to bid. Making this investment would ensure that every bidder works from the same documents, allowing a more realistic comparison.

Even then, bidding has another drawback in that it reduces everything to

want. A professional remodeler who knows how to value engineer may suggest changing the floor plans and elevations, or using different materials. It's one reason why you should choose a remodeler before starting the design process.

cost. Yes, cost is crucial--everyone has a budget--but so is finding a remodeler with the right experience and personality for you and your project.

The best approach is to interview three remodelers, focusing on a good fit for you, not on price. You are committing to a business relationship that, depending on the project, could last weeks or months. Workers may be in and around your living space on a regular basis. That means the remodeler needs to be someone you like and trust--someone you can easily collaborate with. Follow your gut. Part of a good match is personal compatibility, and part is how they do business. For instance, a lot of homeowners like to change things after they start to see their new space taking shape, so make sure the company's change order policy is one you are comfortable with.

If you're working with an architect or designer, then it's best to choose the remodeler before design work starts. With both professionals involved from the beginning, the remodeler can create budget estimates as the plans get drawn. This ensures you get a design you like and can afford.

Start by walking through the existing house with both of them, and then ask for a preliminary design concept and a ballpark price. If you don't like or can't afford their first drafts, ask them to do some value engineering. Once you're satisfied with the general approach and price range, they can work together to create detailed plans and specs. You will end up with a negotiated price that meets your needs, and you are likely to be happier than if you had gotten conventional bids.

Warm regards,

*Gary*

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