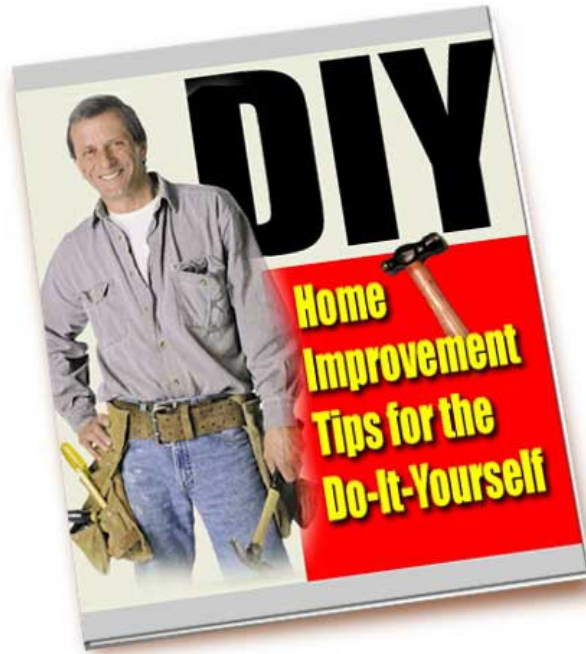


Home Improvement 101: Understanding the Do-it-Yourself.



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Most of the homeowners these days think or plan for home remodeling projects for one particular reason – to address an immediate need or provide for the future of the house. Well, any home remodeling project, whether it be a simple replacement of fixtures or perhaps a major addition, it critically involve at least some pre-planning. Aside from that, there is also a need for the home owner to invest financially for the project. I am pretty sure that no one wants to become involved in a so-called “money pit” situation. Are you familiar with it? It’s actually a series of events in which one home remodeling repair inevitably leads to a dozen unplanned repairs.

Now, if you are thinking of remodeling your house by yourself, knowing that you can eliminate the labor expense and chop a project’s cost in half than hiring a contractor, then you should first take a moment to consider a few important questions before jumping headfirst into a major home Do-It-Yourself project. Always note that home improvements can be like a Chinese puzzle of complexity, with interlocking portions that must proceed in exactly the right direction and order. Planning, as you all know, is the key. So, it is very necessary for you to be clear about your goals, and in the end develop a comprehensive plan for achieving them.

It is also worthy to note that whether you are adding a room, installing new cabinets, installing insulation, or building a deck, spending at least extra little time planning before you actually launch your home remodeling project can no doubt make the process much smoother. If all is well, then the results are far more successful. Isn’t it?

Here are the preliminary questions to ask yourself before hiring contractors or investing in building materials:

Is a building permit needed?

As you may know, some of the home remodeling or improvement projects may involve structural adjustments or elaborate re-workings of current electrical and plumbing circuits. These jobs are perhaps among the most difficult, and maybe dangerous. They may even be susceptible to mistakes which can be quite costly. Plumbing, for example, involves crawling under the house.

So, before a homeowner can start an addition, the city department anywhere in the world which oversees private construction projects must issue a building permit. It is this permit actually that insures that the home improvement plans meet certain building codes, and only those qualified workers will handle the essential rewiring and refitting needs in the house.

Am I capable of performing this home improvement project myself?

One thing to remember here is that even a simple replacement of bathroom or kitchen fixtures perhaps can involve some background knowledge of safety factors. Also, if you are considering wallpapering and interior painting, then you should know that these are other areas where amateurs do-it-yourselfers may find themselves over their heads. Given this fact, it is then worth noting that before tackling any form of remodeling plan, the homeowner should first invest some extra time reading some home improvement books or watching videos produced by professionals. There are also some in-store demonstrations of basic remodeling techniques that are available these days, including some technical support. Some of them are usually provided at any local building supply store.

Will the home remodeling plan address the actual problem?

When it comes to home improvements, most of the homeowners find themselves in a constant state of instability. The truth is instead of investing a substantial amount of time and effort in a particular large remodeling project which may resolve the entire dilemma; they tend to form a number of smaller improvements over time. And, what does this imply is that this can prove to be even more costly to repair later. Repainting a room will not make it larger, for instance. Because of this common consequence, sometimes it is recommendable to just hold off on a certain home remodeling plan until all of the necessary work can be accomplished at one time.

Are licensed contractors available for hire?

Thinking for hiring a professional contractor? If so, please ask yourself first if your remodeling project really calls for a professional help. Perhaps it is best to note that a good contractor can be a life saver. However, if you get a bad contractor, better expect

nightmares. Yes, bad contractors can be a nightmare, especially for the nervous homeowners.

Therefore, be careful of who you will appoint to handle the more delicate home improvement tasks. If you have a friend or relative, or if you know someone who has recently made home remodeling similar to your own plans, I think asking the contractor's name and contact information is worth considering. Aside from that, you have the chance to ask some local building stores for referrals. Note that most of these stores deal with reputable local contractors on a daily basis.

There is one particular thing that you should know about a good contractor though – He or she is always in demand. So, if this is the case, then you may want to plan your home improvement plan around his or her schedule. But please, when it comes to hiring contractors, try not to allow impatience to be your guide. Always think that there may be a very good reason why a certain unknown contractor is available right away. After all, there is always a purpose and a reason for everything.

So, all questions and doubts are settled. Now, what will you do next? To know the answers, just continue reading.

Keys to Proper Planning

Here, I will be discussing about some helpful steps that could help you in planning your home improvement project. What will be mentioned below are based on the experts' advices that I have gathered online. Here they are:

Consider Setting Your Priorities

Many experts recommend breaking down the various elements of your plans and rating the importance of each aspect. It is so common that people want fast, inexpensive, and high quality outputs. I myself agree to that. So, as a rule you can pick two of these. If you want it fast and inexpensive, the possibilities are pretty good that it won't be high quality. On the other hand, if you want it fast and high quality, chances are it won't be inexpensive, and so on.

Estimate the Overheads

Do some homework. That's one of the most important things to consider when it comes to home improvement. The reason behind this is that allows you to accurately anticipate costs, and after all nothing is worse than stopping progress halfway through a home improvement project for lacks of funds. Do you agree with me? If so, then great!

Specifically, you can start anticipating the cost by visiting a particular home improvement center perhaps for you to be able to know what the materials and fixtures will cost. Furthermore, I guess it is often a good idea to obtain at least three bids for the

work from contractors or other home remodeling professionals. This bidding can be considered even if you plan to do some or all of your own work.

Most of the experts said that obtaining bids from contractors and professionals can provide a homeowner a feel for what the work will involve. It can even help you determine the potential savings of considering or doing your home improvement yourself. However, there are some cases that looking at the numbers you have estimated may convince you that it is much wiser to consider looking up and hiring for a professional.

Look for Any Help You Will Need

Yes, it is given that you are a do-it-yourselfer, but even when you do your home improvement by yourself, you don't have to do it BY yourself. Note that some jobs may take two or more days to be accomplished. Thus, asking for some help, maybe from your family or friends, will make your project safe and proper. Just schedule somebody you know to assist you even before you encounter these jobs.

Another reason to support this piece of advice is that most home improvements involve a range of different tasks. Each task oftentimes requires knowledge and skills, from design and construction to wiring, plumbing, and finish work. As what most of the experts often suggest, the overall remodeling project might go far more smoothly if you hire a pro for certain job parts. For example, when remodeling your beloved kitchen, chances are you might want to install the flooring and cabinets yourself but bring in plumber for installing new piping.

The bottom line is, just be realistic about your skills. Never try to take on work that you won't be able to accomplish or may end up looking unprofessional. Simply avoid intricate work or work that requires a high degree of craftsmanship, unless you're competent enough at the job.

If you do cry for a professional help, it is always critically important to make sure that they are qualified and reliable. Of course, there are some ways to find pros, and perhaps the best way to find good help is through personal recommendations. Otherwise, you can find qualified, pre-screened plumbers, electricians, contractors and similar professionals on the web through a certain online service.

Gather the Necessary Tools and Resources

Before you start working with your home improvement project, it is important to make sure that you have gathered on site the tools, materials, and other resources you will need to complete the task. If in case your current tool kit doesn't include certain specialty tools that would be of great use, then try exploring for some stores to buy or rent them.

Here are some key materials, fixtures and appliances that should be scheduled for delivery:

- Tiles
- Windows
- Cabinets
- Plumbing fixtures

Always consider those materials before you begin remodeling your home as far too many people plunge into demolishing their old kitchen only to find out that their new cabinets have been back ordered for delivery in twelve weeks. Yes, that oftentimes happens.

Explore the Need for a Permit

Early in this article, I mentioned about the need for a building permit. Now, if you have decided to obtain one, then try to visit your city or county building department to find out whether permits are needed. This will even help you to discover any requirements for zoning or building. However, a piece of advice is that, be sure that the adjustments you plan or think to happen are possible. Not only is the possibility worthy of notice, but also the legality of the changes. Both are important before engaging yourself too far into planning.

Another reason for asking a permit or knowing requirements is that, chances are good that any room addition will be governed by zoning and setback restrictions. So, if your intention is simply to do your own work, be sure that your town allows this. There are some cities out there that require electrical and plumbing work to be handled and accomplished by a licensed pro.

Also, there are some areas where permits are needed for work that leaves great impacts on the structure of the house, or that involves changing electrical wiring or plumbing. There is also a great possibility that you will need a permit if your intention is to change the roofline, reposition the plumbing fixtures, or move a bearing wall. Nevertheless, you may not need one for repairing doors and windows, installing new floor coverings, or making some minor repairs. The point here is if a permit is required; don't just proceed doing your own work without it. That's simply it!

Consider and Make a Timeline

Another major key for proper planning is to carve out a block of time that is long enough to get the work done. Then, set certain mileposts for completing the work phase within that framework you've made. Just be aware that doing your own work will probably take you longer than you expect. As commonly noticed, it is likely to take you twice as long. So, within the established timeline, try accounting for the delivery time of anything that must be special order, such as the materials, fixtures, and appliances.

Set Up Your Systems

In every home improvement project, it is typically a great idea for the homeowner to rent a dumpster and have it delivered before any major demolition starts. Perhaps it is great to

coordinate delivery with start-of-work as this saves you from paying excessive rental fees. However, if certain contractors and other professionals will be involved in the remodeling project, it is best to set up a meeting to tackle any related matters, such as logistics as well as the work that needs to be completed. For some, this is also the best time to form daily schedules, including ground rules such as use of bathrooms, working hours, and so on. As a homeowner, the one primarily involved in the planning, it is necessary to make sure that you have asked the cell phone or other contact numbers for all the key players.

Now, we already have tackled the preliminary questions to ask and the basic steps to take for proper home improvement planning. So, why don't you consider home designing now? I think that sounds good, right? Well, the next thing that you should consider is the following:

Considering Jumpstart Home Design

I am sure that all of you have seen those motivational speakers on public television, the ones who can fix all life's troubles with few simple guidelines. Well, as you may have noticed, the things they say make absolute sense. How do you know it? Have you noticed the camera always cutting away to the audience, who either smile knowingly, have tears glistening in the corners of their eyes, or nod in rapt agreement? Those expressions are concrete evidences to support their being sensible. So, if those speakers can turn lives around with a few simple rules, so you can.

So, below are the commonly recommended steps for anyone designing a home or addition. Just read on.

Sloppiness? Start Out of It!

Some of the amateur designers these days always want to jump in and start drafting long before their home improvement plans are fully worked out. I guess, it is nice for you to know that architects don't just sit down, think for a minute, and then start drawing up detailed plans of the remodeling. In fact, the real design work gets done in rough sketches. Yes, rough sketches! Sometimes hundreds of them. Drafting then is the final stage, and for some architects, the least important. So, start out sloppy. There's nothing wrong with it, after all.

Tip: Don't rely on Computer-aided drafting (CAD) programs, that are considered as particular dangers for amateurs since they make half-baked ideas look polished long before they're ready. So, if you don't invest enough time and effort at the outset, such program won't help you. It will just provide you a flawless-looking set of lousy home design plans.

Restrictions? Embrace Them!

During the process of home improvement planning, you might face almost infinite options and you literally couldn't create them unless you had some kind of guidelines to hem you in. So, since this is the usual case, don't just think of physical or any monetary limitations as a hindrance. Why don't you consider certain restrictions as your greatest aid in decision making? Just be positive.

Design from the Inside Out

Thinking for a floor plan? If so, don't just regard it as a big sheet cake to be carved up into the right sized pieces. As a person envisioning something great for your own home, start planning with the principal rooms and then let things accrete outward. While doing this, don't worry about the lining on the walls as you can always tidy things up a bit later. At this point, just concentrate on what you are doing from the inside out.

Form a Hierarchy

Most experts often consider ranking the importance of every room beforehand. Accordingly, this approach will allow you to decide which rooms deserve the best view, the most expensive finishes, and so on. Usually, the major rooms such as the living room, master bedroom, and family room top the list, but still it is your call. If you find that cooking is your big passion, for instance, then I think the kitchen should be prioritized. You could design your kitchen by setting it in an area where the garden is accessible, with a fancier ceiling, or maybe some special features. Just listen to your call.

Adhere to Good Solar Orientation

According to some experts, adhering to good solar orientation will make many of your home improvement planning decision for you. You can face your living areas toward the sunny southern exposure, and have your utilitarian areas like the garage, laundry and bathrooms face north. Aside from that, you can make expose your rooms to sunlight at the time of day that they're used most. In particular, you can set the breakfast room facing east for morning light, or the dining room facing west for afternoon sun. You also have the chance to orient bedrooms in accordance with your preference for morning or afternoon sun. It is important to note however that not every site can accommodate these mentioned ideals. But as the aphorism goes, "the closer you get, the better".

Get Stuck On a Design Problem? Don't Just Fizzle Out!

We can't deny the fact that there are really some times that we find ourselves stuck on a certain problem. So, if for instance you get stuck on a design problem, don't just fizzle out and leave well enough alone. Perhaps the best thing to do is to quit for a few days and then go back to your plan with a fresh eye and positive mind. Simply repeat this cycle until every problem is solved. As often said, creative success demands an attention to detail, and this is true in architecture as well as in life.

So, I guess I've told you enough about proper planning for home improvement. If you are still with me after ranting those stuffs, then congratulations and good luck to your home improvement project.