

5 Ways to Prepare First-Time Remodelers Before Work Begins

Pros share their best tips and practices for working with homeowners who are new to the renovation process

 **Kyle Troutman** July 18, 2023
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For homeowners who have never hired a remodeling professional, a new project can bring up many questions and concerns. Without enough guidance throughout the process, clients can feel overwhelmed.

Eight general contractors and design-build pros share how they provide homeowners who are undergoing their first renovation with a smooth experience from start to finish. Take a look at these five tips that can help you guide customers through the project's planning stages. In part two, we'll look at [how to guide homeowners through demolition and construction](#).



1. Set Realistic Expectations

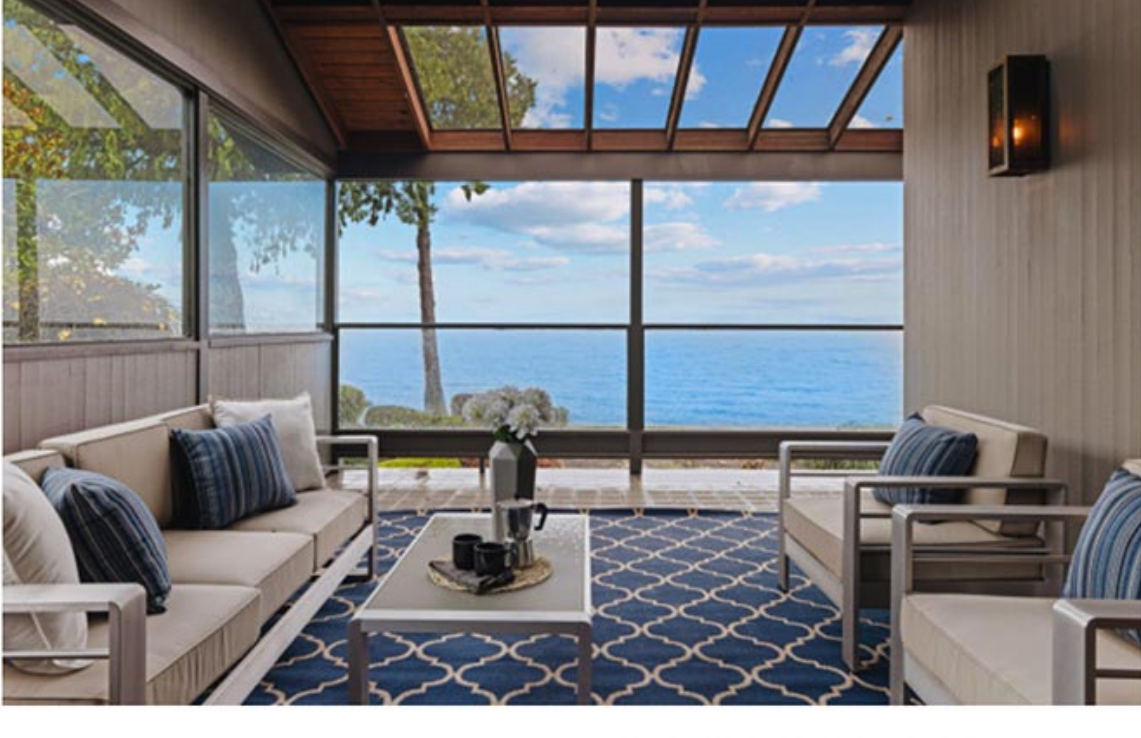
Gauge your client's level of understanding during each phase of the project. This can help you develop and maintain a pragmatic approach to the work ahead. "As a rule of thumb, it is always better to start before their expressed level of understanding so as to not assume they truly do understand," says JD Staley, CEO of [Staley Transformations](#).

For any project, it's essential to set expectations and deliver the product your client is looking for, says Gregory P. Sforza, president of [Done Right Remodeling](#). Being purposeful and reasonable with your goals can make all the difference, especially when working with homeowners who need extra guidance or attention.



2. Give Clients a Road Map During the Consultation

Remodeling and construction can be complex. And without a solid understanding of the process, clients working with a professional for the first time can get anxious and antsy. Give them a clear road map during the consultation so they feel comfortable and ready to move forward. "We walk through the process on our first call, whether it be a phone, video or in-person consultation," says Gregg Cantor, president and CEO of [Murray Lampert Design, Build, Remodel](#).



Owner and founder Francisco Gomez Palacio VI of [Integrated Home Improvement](#) says answering questions during consultations helps the client and the team get on the same page. "Questions usually come up during the initial consultation and any follow-up consultations, so we do a lot of the explaining of the process naturally as we do our work to get a quote or get a grasp on the client's design goals."

[Houzz Pro](#) software has tools that make it easy to communicate with clients. For example, you can add timelines, daily logs and important files to the client dashboard through the app.

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3. Define the Client's Role

It's important to give the homeowners a clear role to play. "Remember, the homeowner is part of the overall team on the project," says Melinda Dzinic, co-founder of [Euro Design Build](#). "This is an opportunity for our clients to learn so much about their home and surroundings in order to make a meaningful change in a place that will serve them for years to come."

Clients who are new to home renovations should be encouraged to learn more about the building process. "The most important thing a client needs to know is that they do not know what they don't know about the remodeling process until it's too late and will cost them too much," Dzinic says. Championing homeowners to educate themselves can lead to better outcomes.



4. Warn Clients That Problems Will Arise

Issues can pop up at any time during a project. "There are always a few bumps in the road in construction and remodeling," Cantor of Murray Lampert Design, Build, Remodel says. Helping homeowners embrace this idea early on can empower them to set realistic expectations.

Builder Michael Griffin of [Capitol City Wood Works](#) tells his clients not to worry when things go wrong. "I tell them we will have at least one unexpected problem, which we will solve," he says.

Owner and founder April Bettinger of [Nip Tuck Remodeling](#) reminds homeowners that even with extensive planning, the likelihood of dealing with an unforeseen setback is high. "We also talk about the reality that humans are manufacturing and installing products and they will make mistakes because no one is perfect," she says.



5. Talk About Potential Curveballs

First-time remodeling clients need to know what they're in for. Talk to them early so they're equipped to handle surprises when they happen.

Staley Transformations believes that delays and costs are the biggest surprises for clients. Delays can be caused by a team member dealing with health-related issues, material availability or mishaps and mistakes.

Warning homeowners about pricing can save everyone a lot of frustration. "Clients don't realize how much everything has gone up, including labor costs," Staley says. "It is so volatile that I have put a seven-day expiration on every proposal and a clause protecting me from material cost increases above 5% from when the quote was generated."



Weather issues can throw off a project's momentum and progress. "I think one of the biggest things a homeowner can be caught off guard by are weather delays, particularly for exterior projects," Sforza of [Done Right Remodeling](#) says. Problems with existing systems like plumbing, electrical and heating and cooling can also cause unexpected delays.

Certified renovator Lino Carosella of [TRV Design Build](#) says clients are often surprised by how long it takes to complete a project. What homeowners see on TV can distort their view of the true length of a home remodel.

Your turn: How do you prepare homeowners before you begin work on their projects? Share your tips in the Comments.