



# What To Ask Before Hiring A Contractor



Contractors like working with clients who ask questions. It means they're serious about their construction project and know what they want.

So if you're in the market for a reliable contractor who can work within your budget, check the questions you should ask below.

### **1. How Long Have You Been in Business?**

This is a simple question to start off with. What you're looking for is a contractor who has been in business long enough to work out any wrinkles a start-up business may experience. They'll have a process down and know exactly how to handle the various situations that come their way.

"What if I know a contractor who just started their business but has been in the industry a while?"

Good question! We suggest starting them off with a simpler and smaller project. Yes, they may have ample contracting experience, but any business, no matter how great they turn out to be, goes through some small growing pains. So it's best to start them off with a smaller project first. If you like their work you can always hire them for larger projects later on.

### **2. What Local and National Organizations Do You Belong To?**

There are several organizations a contractor can belong to, like:

- Greater Houston Builders Association (GHBA) [www.ghba.org](http://www.ghba.org)
- Texas Association of Builders (TAB) [www.texasbuilders.org](http://www.texasbuilders.org)
- National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) [www.nahb.org](http://www.nahb.org)

Now, a great contractor doesn't need to belong to all organizations on this list. But belonging to some (if not all) is a great help to them and their clients. TAB can even help you craft contract for your project. For more information on how they can help, check out their website [at www.texasbuilders.org](http://www.texasbuilders.org)

### **3. What Insurance Do You Have? May I See Proof?**

No matter what job your contractor is hired for, they need to at least have general and liability insurance. Like with the required licenses, never assume your contractor has insurance. It's always better to ask and be sure to see the original insurance certificate yourself for proof. For better protection ask to be added to their policy as an "additional insured."

### **4. What About Permits and Proper Inspections?**

Will your construction plans alter the structure of your home or commercial property? If so, your contractor should know what permits and inspections you'll need. They should also offer to handle this step for you. A good contractor has been through this before and likely has good relationships with the permit and inspection offices, so it's best to have them deal with it.

## **5. Do You Know How Long My Project Will Take?**

By now your contractor has already inspected the potential project area and should already have a good idea of how long your project should take. They should also know what elements that might affect your project's timeline, such as other bids they're working on and other jobs they need to finish. So be sure to ask about other projects and how they'll handle any timeline changes should they arise.

## **6. How Will We Handle Payment?**

If the contractor you're considering asks you to pay for the whole project up-front, run. A good contractor would never ask for the full amount and would instead work out a payment schedule with you. Be sure to talk about the terms of payment and if you hire them, get those terms in writing so you have something to refer to later in case of any sudden surprises.

## **7. Will I Have a Dedicated Team?**

When you have a construction project completed on your home or commercial property, it's important that you have the same team each day. You don't want your finished project to look like an amalgamation of different tastes - you want one that's a single, cohesive style. So be sure to ask which people will be coming to your home each day and how many other projects they are currently working on. You should also ask these follow-up questions:

- Who is the project manager, and what specifically will they oversee each day?
- Do you work with subcontractors? If so, what have you done to properly qualify them, and are they covered by your liability and worker's compensation insurance?
- How often will the business owner check in on the progress of the project?

## **8. How Can I Reach You?**

One of the most important pieces of information you'll need is who you should contact with your questions. So be sure to ask who you should contact and how they like to be contacted, whether it be by text, phone, or email. This person is most likely going to be the project manager or business owner, so get their information.

You should also find out how long they typically take to respond. You don't want to be in a situation where you have an urgent question that can't be answered because you didn't know how to contact them.

Knowing how long they take to respond is handy so you don't waste time waiting for a response.

## **9. What Is a Typical Day Like?**

It's important you get a sense of what their day will be like, so be sure to ask what time they expect to start and finish each day. Will you need to move/relocate anything in the area they're working in? What about noise level? Will you need to be there part of the day or can you leave to tend to errands or meetings?

You should also let them know a few things as well, such as:

- What bathrooms can they use?
- What will the parking situation be like?
- Where are the power outlets?
- Will anyone, including pets, be home while they work?

Have this information ready so your contractor and their crew can plan accordingly.

## **10. How Will You Clean up? What About Tool Storage?**

No matter how long your project takes, ask about the clean-up process. A reputable contractor will be more than willing to talk about this as well as how they plan to store their tools.

This is also the perfect time to air any concerns you have about cleaning. Is there anything they need to be aware of? Any areas you'd like to be cleaned each day? Discuss this with your contractor now to avoid any messes later.

## **11. How Will You Protect My Property?**

This question seems tough, but it needs to be talked about. A great contractor won't take offense to this question. Contractors understand that your home and/or commercial property is important to you. It's a no brainer you'll want it to be protected while it's being worked on.

Speaking of protection, ask about the tarps they plan to use, the shoe covers they may wear, and if there are any spots you want cleaned or dusted each day.

## **12. How Will Extra Charges be Handled? What About Disagreements?**

This is probably one of the most important questions to ask. Contractors can be more accurate these days, but changes can still happen that might require a little money.

So ask how impromptu extras will be handled and as well as disagreements. If you decide to hire them (and this goes for any contractor, you may hire) be sure to expressly state it in the contract that they can't go over the agreed budget.

Other items that should be included in your contract are:

- Type of project to be completed and its specifications
- How disputes will be handled
- Change order information
- Payment Schedules

The Texas Association of Builders provides all members with various contract types. Your contractor can let you look at a sample contract, so you can get a feel for what you should include in yours. It's also a good idea to get your contract reviewed by Texas Association of Builders attorney to ensure everything is fair.

### **13. Is There a Warranty for Your Services and Materials?**

A good contractor will not only provide a warranty for their services, but also provide you with copies of the warranties for the materials they've used, like tile and grout.

So be sure to ask about warranty and what it covers before you hire. You don't want a situation where it turns out the warranty won't cover the unexpected.

Another good question to ask is if they'll come back to fix/touch up things. If something was not done as you had discussed, a good contracting company should be willing to make things right with repairs, so ask how about that before they start.

#### **What to Ask Yourself:**

After the meeting is over and all the questions have been answered, take a breather to let it all sink in. As it does, ask yourself how you felt. Did the contractor answer everything calmly and plainly? Did you feel comfortable with them? Did you feel that you could talk out your disagreements if they cropped up?

It's imperative that you feel good about the answers they gave. After all, they're going to be in and out of your property, so you should feel confident and comfortable that they'll do the job well. Ask all these questions and we're sure you'll find the best contractor for your project.

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