

HOW TO EARN A REPUTATION AS A QUALITY BUILDER

DON'T SLEEP ON THE INITIAL MEETING BETWEEN YOUR SITE SUPERVISOR AND NEW HOMEOWNERS

By Andrew Shipp

As a home builder, you control your reputation in the market, and valuable word of mouth depends on how well you execute a handful of items to foster positive customer perceptions and great reviews.

The no-brainer basics are relatively easy but impactful, such as keeping your job-sites clean, delivering a completed product on time, and responding promptly to post-closing service requests.

But there's one, less tangible, thing that can make or break everything else you do

right: effective communication—specifically, the relationship between your jobsite supervisor and the homebuyers during their initial (or pre-) construction meeting.

That meeting is the first and best opportunity during the production phase to start building mutual trust between

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the customer and the person who will be overseeing their home's construction. It effectively lays the groundwork for a great relationship throughout the build and after closing.

Doing it well isn't difficult. As a former supervisor for a Denver-area production builder, I found that not all of my peers were blessed with

the greatest of interpersonal skills. But if they followed a few simple guidelines, an initial customer meeting could be executed quite well and give the homeowners a positive feeling about you, your company, and the job ahead.

Get to Know Your Client

First, and most important, establish a baseline relationship by spending the first few minutes of the meeting getting to know the customer: what they do for a living, where they're from. Ask about their family life, hobbies, and other interests. Listen for shared interests or backgrounds, and briefly tell them about yourself, too.

While this step may seem obvious (or maybe unnecessary or uncomfortable), I can't overstate its importance. People trust people with whom they have a connection, and that only happens when you take the time to show a genuine interest beyond their wallet.



During construction, site supervisors need to be the “eyes and ears” of your homebuyers, providing updates, assurances, and specifics—good and bad—to maintain trust, alleviate frustration, and reduce stress.



The first meeting between your site supervisor and a homebuyer should focus on gaining mutual trust through listening and sharing experiences, as well as setting realistic expectations for the construction process and ongoing communications.

Set Expectations

From there, the super needs to set realistic expectations about each phase of the build. Consider the buyer who stops by to look at the house weeks before closing and is shocked to see drywall damage, then immediately seeks to get it repaired.

But if you educate buyers early on about your punch list and touch-up process, they'll know that cosmetic damage is normal and will be fixed prior to close.

The initial construction meeting also is the time to set expectations for future communications. Like a passenger whose flight is delayed but gets no information from the airline, homebuyers can become

irritated quickly (and rightfully so) if they are surprised by missed deadlines or vague excuses—no matter the cause.

On the flip side, a delayed airline passenger who knows how long it will be until their flight takes off can adjust. And in these uncertain times of supply chain delays, it's critical to be proactive about issues that may alarm or frustrate buyers.

With that, lay out the schedule for future meetings, such as pre-drywall, pre-close, and the closing walk-through. Buying a house is a huge commitment and it can be stressful, so make sure customers know when they will receive updates to help alleviate some of their uncertainty and worry.

How well this meeting goes is key to a buyer's perception of your company as a quality home builder. Unfortunately, I find a lot of builders don't think about how critical building this early-stage rapport is to their reputations and referral business. But those that make it a priority to establish a meaningful relationship at the start are the same builders whose customers love their work. **PB**

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