

BUILDINGS

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Top 10 Zen Zingers for Peace of Mind Construction

By Bart Mendel

Disaster stories in construction abound: unfinished homes and buildings, blown budgets, lawsuits and contractors fleeing the state. True story: a potential client came to me after receiving an anonymous packet on their front doorstep after they had hired a contractor, containing 200 pages of his nefarious crimes.

There were restraining orders, lawsuits and judgments - he even hooked his pickup truck to an old client's electrical service and ripped it out! I have had 35 years both as a Buddhist teacher and construction professional counseling others on how to avoid disputes and disasters in construction - here are a few tips to maintain your sanity:



1. Seek Wisdom in All the Right Places

Hire the best construction professionals within your means. Going too cheap may cost you in the long run, sending your peace of mind right out the window. King Solomon wrote: "Listen to wise advice and follow it closely." Maybe he learned this from building his temple.

2. Deconstructing the Construction Team

Get to know the players before they're hired. Don't just check licenses and the references they provide to you. Talk to former clients, vendors and people outside their reference list for true enlightenment.

3. Take a Big View on Time and Budget

Manage your expectations. Remember that the best work may not always be the cheapest and fastest. Carefully think through what you can afford, and then allow a substantial contingency – 10-15% or more. Expect to spend every penny of it and you won't be disappointed.

4. Hire a Master and Let Go

Professional construction managers are essential to keep large projects on time, on budget and risk managed. The money invested will end up saving you substantially, often more than the CM's own fees. A CM will keep all the players on the same page. Let go and let them do their job.

5. Plan, Plan, Plan

Prepare a preconstruction plan with your team, or best, have a CM do it. Seek contractor input early and pay for estimating services (in this way you won't feel obliged to hire them). Planning saves real time and money in construction where 90% of the cost and all the liability occur.

6. Value Real Value

Don't automatically pick the lowest bid – pick the one that gives the most value. You get what you pay for, and if you pay too little, you often get even less. Pick general and trade contractors, architects, engineers and consultants based on relevant experience and value, not just price.

7. Be Omniscient

Remember the initial price from your architect or contractor is not the same as the final price. A low price that doesn't include the entire scope of the project is meaningless - throw it out and get bids that provide a realistic budget for everything you want or may need from the get-go.

8. Say No to Stress

Know and manage your stress and risk tolerance. Stay within your means and don't take on a bigger project than you can handle. Embrace change - learn to accept chaos and dust as progress. During construction? Meditate each morning and maintain a sense of humor.

9. You Don't Have to be a Hobbit to Go Green

Focus on ways to reduce energy and water use. Site your building to take advantage of passive solar. Improve the efficiency of your exterior walls and roof to reduce energy for heating and cooling. Enjoy the peace that comes from reducing energy consumption and sustaining the environment.

10. Positive People Power

Buildings are designed and built by people so clear, calm communication is your essential survival tool. Offer praise regularly. Remember, job satisfaction is often more important than compensation. Help them do their best work--after all, they are building your home.

People often undervalue the knowledge required to design and build successfully. Just because you own a hammer and a cordless drill, the odds are construction professionals know more than you do. Evaluate them, hire them, trust them and let them build you a great home, where the real peace of mind begins.