Last year, we asked 33 contractors about callbacks and found that the main reason for contractor callbacks is other contractors, or, to be more specific, it’s the rush to complete work and the lack of proper sequencing that results in work already done, having to be redone.

We contacted 20 of the same folks to find out how things may have changed since we last spoke with them. Eleven contractors said that damage caused by other trades was still the number-one reason for callbacks, especially “electricians and plumbers who always make a hole in the wall someplace,” according to a Tennessee contractor. A North Carolinian, who isn’t known for mincing words, says the callbacks he receives are “the result of some bonehead dinging or banging up a wall.”

These “callbacks” are not considered preventable by most contractors and are written off as the cost of doing business (see To Charge or Not to Charge on page 42).

Nobody expects anyone stomping around in work boots and swinging ladders to be as precise as a ballerina when it comes to moving around. Perhaps the best way to reduce trade damage, as a contractor from Nevada points out, is

By Steven Ferry
To Charge Or Not To Charge

When it comes to the cost of doing business, there is the question of recouping or reducing the costs of fixing the goofs made by other trades.

Several subs do not bill, because the other subs are friends, or because they’d never get paid anyway, or because trade damage is an expected by-product and cost of doing business.

For those who work something out so they are not out of pocket, the following solutions are in effect:

In Arizona, one CC pays subs to repair the damage caused by other trades and then bills those who caused the damage.

When an Idaho contractor can identify which other trade caused the damage, he sends them the bill. Sometimes the GC splits the costs among the trades, and other times, the subs trade out the cost of fixing damage caused by one, for damage done by the other.

The Louisianan generally bills other trades for their damage and eats the costs of making up for shorfalls in the designs so the architect won’t “nail us to the wall on the next project.”

Everybody appears to bill an owner who changes his mind, although the North Carolinian says, “It depends on the suck-up value of your customer, which is as nice as I can put it for print. You either take care of the problem for clients you do a lot of work for, or you know they will pay up for some major change.”

to adhere to proper sequences—with the HVAC folks doing their bit before the ceilings are installed, etc.

The general opinion, however, is that callbacks, while being a pain in the time-honored place, are not a big issue. Seven of the 20 said they had very few callbacks, if any. Some attribute their
success to having trained and experienced folks on the job, and the others give the credit to having good quality-control efforts in place.

**More Gain Than Pain**

Five contractors who were experiencing callbacks said they had been able to reduce them as a result of quality-control efforts. One contractor from North Carolina, who had had plenty of callbacks in the past, said he has experienced a 50 percent reduction in callbacks for two reasons: “The people who work for me on stucco and EIFS are better educated now through efforts such as AWCI’s seminars,” he says, “and the

The National Association of Home Builders has conducted surveys of its membership each year since 1990. The volume of callbacks seems to be holding fairly steady, but response times have been increasing. In the most recent survey, a quarter of the builders said they respond within 48 hours. More than half take up to five days to take action. This means that the remaining one-in-five builders take longer than five days to even investigate, let alone fix, any callback issues.

Pressure of work and out-of-pocket issues may contribute to this slow response time, but they translate into upset for the owner and a bad image for the company and/or profession.

There’s no real reason a same-day telephone call cannot be initiated to determine the extent of the problem and to at least assure the owner that he is on the radar.

So often, in the absence of any other information, the aggrieved party can only conjure up the worst of scenarios, none of them beneficial to either the contractor or the owner.

lawsuits have enabled us all to learn from our mistakes.”

One Missouri contractor specified that he had reduced callbacks by using taped-on cornerbead.

The one contractor who had experienced an increase in callbacks over the last year complained of GCs in his area
(Virginia) wanting point-ups almost on a daily basis to repair dings, gouges and screw pops. “When you do a lot of work for a contractor, you have to go along with it, but you can’t charge for it or figure it into your bid, otherwise someone will underbid you. Other contractors have the same problem with subs being less careful recently. We are trying to reduce these point ups and wait for the final punch list.”

Of the non-trade callbacks that did occur, three contractors said they were the result of the owner changing his or her mind. The most common callback came when the owner realized that the real-life color doesn’t come out as he had envisioned it from the color sample, according to the North Carolinian.

One contractor mentioned the occasional product defect, and another talked of cracking as houses settled over time. Two spoke
of screw pops, and two others complained of low lighting levels during construction hid uneven surfaces or finishes. Another two stated that the pressure to complete jobs in unreal time frames resulted in quality dropping and small errors being made that then needed to be remedied.

The last reason for callbacks comes from an old salt in Louisiana: incomplete specs. “As any contractor or GC knows who has been around construction sites as long as I have, you can’t win against an architect. So, when they neglect to specify something that is needed, we eat the costs. We have been insisting for the past year on drawing plans with more
Callbacks are large as life and twice as ugly.Callbacks are large as life and twice as ugly, like anything else one has to do twice when once should have been enough. To those GCs and subs who pursue quality and training programs to reduce callbacks, all power to you. To those who jump all over callbacks as if their very existence is an insult to the company name, all power to you, too.

Rolls Royce has been known to helicopter a mechanic and a new part directly to a stranded motorist. When the grateful motorist later asked where the bill is, he is told that he must be mistaken, because Rolls Royces do not break down.

If that approach would break the budget for a contractor, maybe it’s time to find a way of being reimbursed for the extra work you put in that really aren’t callbacks but the goofs of others. Fair’s fair, after all.

About the Author
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