



# Taking the Sting Out of Remodeling

by Steve Jeffries

You have your customer lined up. You have your contract. You have the job started. You have dust.

Then you have complaints: "Does it have to be so dusty?"; "Can't we use the kitchen at all?"; "What's this thing you're taking out called, a bearing wall?"

At S.M. Jeffries & Co., we try to warn the customer in advance about the unpleasant aspects of remodeling. But we also try to make this message as pleasant as possible.

To do that, we use a letter. It's a friendly one—it even says so in the first line. It's humorous, too. It's done on our computer. That way, we can print out each one with the name of the customer and make it look very personal. We send it to every customer before any work starts.

We figure it this way: More communication equals less stress and a better environment to create the best work. A similar letter might work for your company. ■

Mr. and Mrs. George Smith  
1234 Elm St.  
Anytown, OR 12345

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Smith:

This friendly letter should ease some of the worry and anxiety associated with remodeling. Many years of involvement in residential and commercial remodeling have taught me to anticipate a number of, shall we say, construction foibles inherent in remodeling. As you read through this letter, we hope you'll get a laugh, an education, and perhaps an understanding that *yes*, we know what you're going through:

**"Gee, those are nice pajamas, Mrs. Jones..."** Yup. We'll know you pretty well by the end of the job. We'll do our best to work around your life-style. We normally start work at 8:30 a.m. This gives most of our clients that very important morning private time for coffee and the paper or getting the kids off to school. Our 8:30 start is a great time to talk to us about changes, concerns, colors, and construction stuff. Another good time is right after lunch. We usually take 45 minutes to an hour at noon. We start cleaning up at 4:30 p.m. and end work at 5 p.m. Occasionally we might work late to finish a certain process.

**"Excuse me, but is that a banana in your ear?"** Good communication is essential in assuring a successful project. Industry statistics show that 80% of remodeling business comes from referrals. So, if we don't please you, we won't be remodeling your neighbor's home. We've had occasion to be on the same street on the same block for four jobs in a row! We do this by establishing communication guidelines. As mentioned above, the *best* time to talk is first thing in the morning. The *worst* time is just before lunch.

If you have a brainstorm at 4 a.m., please feel free to call. I unplug the phone at 9 p.m., so see you after coffee!

**"Getting down to the real nitty gritty..."** The most persistent complaint during construction is dust. We have dust-collection bags on all our tools that accept them. And we will make a valiant attempt to partition your living space from the construction process. However, things will get dusty. The best advice is to be a Good Camper. (Apologies to Dan Quayle.) Cover those things that can be covered: bookcases and computers, for instance. Prepare for the worst and you just might find it isn't so bad.

Remember to change the filter on your heating and air-conditioning system after we leave. Or remind us and we'll do it for you. We clean up our mess daily, but the job site will be *broom clean* only.

**"Gosh, your kids sure are cute, and smart, too ..."** But if you have small children who might want to learn the construction business, there are great classes at the local community college. *Your child's safety is your responsibility.*

Job-site safety is one of the biggest concerns of any responsible contractor. Workers' injury claims can ruin a business. We are an injury-free company. With diligence, luck, and your cooperation, we will stay that way.

**"You can't always get what you want."**

But if you try sometime,  
You just might find,  
You get what you need."

—Mick Jagger

Let's get it right the first time. Most people will only remodel once or twice in their lifetime. If you're going to remodel, do it right. Use the best millwork (doors and windows). Go ahead, get the refrigerator with all the buzzers and bells. I know you're not Donald Trump, but ask me about quality. Yes! You do get what you pay for. Remember the joy of a cheap price can fade, but real quality materials and workmanship endure.

**"This restaurant has been inspected by the Department of Health and has been declared full of carpenters..."**

If we are about to remodel your kitchen, you might plan a restaurant tour. Visit a restaurant that you haven't visited for a while or perhaps a few that you have never visited. We'll set up your refrigerator and your microwave oven so you can get to them. Please remember this will all be over soon and your determination to make it a positive experience will make the entire process one that you'll look back on fondly.

**"It's sure been a long time since we've seen Aunt Millie."** To go on vacation during construction, please do several things:

- Spend more time with us up front. Details such as sheet vinyl type and color should be established. Normally, we provide a cost allowance for things like paint, laminate, and vinyl but hold off on color selection until the shell is completed and the case work is installed.
- Don't leave home just to grieve. Go on your vacation with the thought that you're going to have fun while avoiding the muss and fuss of remodeling. If you can't leave town without thinking that everything will go bonkers without you, it's best not to go.
- If you do go, leave a number where we can reach you. We've never had a change or correction that couldn't be handled over the phone.

**"Stress? What stress? I always cry after yelling at my spouse."** We recognize that remodeling is not necessarily fun, but a positive attitude can make it enjoyable.

Preconditioning by friends and neighbors who had bad experiences can lead you to believe that it will be torture. Please remember, this is now, and that was then.

This is Jeffries & Co. and we are going to make this project one we can all be very proud of.  
You've got my word on it.

Steve

Steve Jeffries is the owner of Jeffries & Co. of Eugene, Ore., a 15-year-old firm that handles both residential and commercial remodelings.