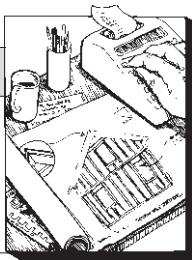


Getting Customer Feedback

by Jerry McDaniel



Some time ago I realized that the customers who don't complain are the ones who need special attention. These people, for whatever reason, may be reluctant to tell you directly about something you did wrong on their remodeling job. Consequently, you walk away thinking you did everything right while they're telling their friends about the things you did wrong.

Since I count on past customers for referrals and repeat business (these make up about 80% of my customer base), I've found a way for all of our customers, especially the quiet ones, to tell us what we can do to serve them better.

Four years ago, we began sending out a job evaluation questionnaire about 30 days after each job is completed. This gives our customers an opportunity to grade us on our performance, workmanship, and service. If there are some things they feel funny about telling us in person, the odds are good that the information

will show up on the form.

I also use the questionnaire as a sales and customer relations tool. During my presentation, I explain the form and its purpose, pointing out that, at our company, we care about our clients even after the work is done and the last draw is collected. If you're on top of your jobs and your personnel, chances are you won't find too many surprises in the forms that are returned to you. But your customers will be pleased that you care about their ideas and opinions.

Creating a Questionnaire

The inspiration for the form we use now came from a book by Walter Stoepelwerth called *Professional Remodeling Management* (HomeTech Publications Inc., 1990; 800/638-8292). Stoepelwerth suggests creating a five-point rating scale and asking your customers to evaluate how you did on salesmanship, production management, job cleanliness,

subcontractors, and so on.

We liked this idea, but we also wanted a little more information from our customers. So we use a nine-question form with space at the end for additional comments. We also give customers a chance to rate our overall performance on a scale of one to ten. If they score us lower than an "8," we make an appointment with the customer to talk with them personally about what we should do differently next time.

No matter what you include in your form, it shouldn't exceed one page. Asking your clients to fill out anything longer may be a burden for them. You'll also encourage them to keep their answers brief and to the point by providing a small amount of space for comments.

One of the questions that's worked best for us is, "Do you plan additional remodeling? When? Type of work?" We take the answers provided here and plug them into a calendar program on our computer. We check the calendar periodically and usually find several leads as a result.

We keep our questionnaire in our computer and print it out with the customer's name at the top so it is more personal. I also sign it at the bottom. We include a self-addressed stamped envelope to make it easier for customers to get the questionnaire back to us. So far, we've never had a client who failed to mail the form back.

Keep 'Em Happy

By far, the majority of the questionnaire results are positive. But once in awhile we get some complaints. These are usually along the line of, "The plumber left his lunch wrappings on the floor." I take care of these complaints immediately — in this case, by calling the plumber and asking him to be tidier next time and apologizing to the homeowner.

On occasion, the form has really paid off. We once had a client who never told us, until his questionnaire arrived, that one of the faucets we'd installed was leaking. After returning to the site to fix it, we discovered that the customer had been really upset about this faucet (and probably ready to tell 15 of his friends that they should never work with our company). In this case, the questionnaire helped us salvage a potentially damaging situation and earned us a satisfied customer. Producing the questionnaire, including secretarial time and postage, runs about \$300 per year. But the payback is priceless. ■

Jerry McDaniel is president of McDaniel Remodeling Company Inc., a \$1.9 million general remodeling firm in Atlanta, Ga. The company has been in business since 1955.



McDANIEL REMODELING CO., INC.

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Smith:

Now that the dust has settled and you have had a chance to live in your new space, would you take a moment to give me your thoughts on what our company did well and where we need improvement? I can assure you that we will use your insight to improve our product and customer service. I have enclosed a stamped, self-addressed envelope for your convenience.

1. Are you satisfied with the quality of construction?
2. Was our salesperson courteous, helpful, and knowledgeable?
3. Was our superintendent courteous, helpful, knowledgeable, and available when needed?
4. Were the people in our office responsive, friendly, and efficient?
5. Were the personnel who worked on your job courteous, helpful, and neat? Were they respectful of your home and yard? Did you feel they were well supervised?
6. What could our company have done to make your job run more smoothly?
7. On a scale of 1 (poor) to 10 (excellent), how would you rate our company's overall performance?
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
8. Do you plan additional remodeling? When? Type of work?
9. May we use you as a reference?

Please add any additional comments that may help us to better serve you. It has been a pleasure working with you. Thank you for your help.

Jerry McDaniel

This job evaluation form has nine questions and fits on a single page, with room at the bottom and on the back for comments.