



## BE A TRUSTED PARTNER

Building a solid, trusting relationship with your clients is the first rule

By Kevin Hansen

While custom-home projects are often some of the most rewarding for a construction management firm, the process can be incredibly stressful for the client. Builders work directly with the homeowners, who are typically juggling careers, family, and a wide variety of other obligations. It quickly becomes overwhelming for clients to manage the development and construction of their home and to ensure tasks are being completed on time and on budget. To take some of the burden off them, you need to identify yourself early on as their partner.

To be a true partner is to become a reliable resource that clients can count on for strategic guidance, comprehensive project management, and honest input. From the very first conversation, you need to work at building a solid relationship so your clients trust you and empower you to make important decisions on their behalf. In short, it requires going above and beyond the traditional scope of a construction management firm and becoming an extension of the client, which in turn allows the client to shift the management burden to you.

It's important to have clear and honest conversations with the homeowners early in the conceptual phases of the project to ensure their vision is well defined and all roles are clearly articulated. Clients can be involved as much or as little as they please,

but, at the end of the day, they still retain all control and final say over the project.

When your clients are able to rely on you to guide the process and advocate for their best interests, this solidarity allows the project to flow far more smoothly and in their favor. Decisions about or changes to scope, budget, and schedule are collaborative and creative, not adversarial, resulting in beautifully constructed homes with minimal stress to the client.

We recently completed a full renovation of a home in Marblehead, Mass., where the homeowners were working parents with two children. Our team was brought onboard early with the designer and we were able to work through a complex and challenging renovation that met the clients' goal of maintaining the existing footprint and views from their oceanside home, while updating and thoughtfully reconfiguring the space to meet the family's specific needs.

What's more, we were able to make decisions and move the project along so that it finished a month early and on budget.

The following are a few key approaches we took on this project that we would recommend to all custom builders:

**1. Listen.** The first time you meet with a client, pay close attention and carefully listen to their overall vision. Repeat what they tell you. Read both verbal and nonverbal cues. Seek to understand what worries them and what excites them.

**2. Be a problem-solver.** Always think three steps ahead and proactively solve

challenges for clients by looking for creative solutions. When confronted with a problem, communication is key. No client ever wants to hear, "We have a problem." They want to hear, "We have a problem and here's how I recommend we resolve it."

**3. Add value.** Constantly seek creative ways to add value for your clients, as they may not necessarily be driven by budget. Increasing the value of their investment is often more important. Finding a way to enhance quality and durability shows clients that you understand them and are taking the long-term view with their best interests in mind. This could be a suggestion of different materials and finishes to enhance the overall aesthetic and functionality of their space. For our Marblehead client, for example, we incorporated a custom picture window to capitalize on the home's striking coastal view.

**4. Provide long-term support.** Never consider your job done. Continue to support clients long after construction is complete. Show them that you are their partner for the long haul. We do this by providing a 24/7 warranty plan for our clients, which offers them the peace of mind that, should something come up, we are ready to help.

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