



The Role and Responsibilities of a General Contractor

If you're considering managing your own project instead of hiring a general contractor, it's important that you understand all that the job entails.

A general contractor oversees and manages large home-improvement and remodeling projects, acting as your main contact and ensuring the work is done to your satisfaction.

While it's not unreasonable to think that a homeowner could act as their own general contractor (and save on the expense), it's a difficult role that requires real skill, expert knowledge and lots of time on-site.

The list that follows is far from complete, but it does provide an overview of the general contractor's typical responsibilities.

Interacts With the Architect

If there's an architect or architectural designer involved, the general contractor will work with that person to ensure the project is implemented as planned.

The architect and the general contractor will typically review the plans together before any work begins. If problems arise, the architect will often look to the general contractor to suggest workable solutions. It's a symbiotic relationship that's difficult for most homeowners to replicate.

Gathers and Evaluates Bids

Every general contractor has a network of trusted sub-contractors. That allows the "general" to gather accurate bids quickly. If you act as your own general contractor, accomplishing the same thing will require quite a bit more time and effort.

For every specialty (electrical, plumbing, etc.), you'll want to get multiple bids. For each of those bids, you'll need to walk the specialty contractor through the project and answer their questions. If one contractor shows you a different way of doing something, you'll need to communicate that to all the other contractors and have them re-bid the job so that all the estimates are alike. And finally, you'll need to compare and contrast the products and techniques used by each contractor to determine if all are of equal quality.

Coordinates Specialty Contractors

Coordinating things with the busy schedules of multiple contractors is a real juggling act.

When a general contractor is on the job, specialty contractors are usually willing to commit to a tight schedule. If an inexperienced homeowner is handling things, however, those specialists will often request more time, which can add weeks to the completion date of your project. Plus, there could be cancellation penalty fees to pay if things get off track.

Provides Skilled Labor

A good general contractor has the skills to handle the carpentry tasks required on a project – and they often end up performing much of that work. That's why projects managed by a professional rarely run behind schedule.

Answers Questions and Resolves Issues

The general contractor has to be on-site regularly, inspecting the work as it's completed, providing answers and resolving issues. If not, a sub-contractor may have to wait – or guess at a solution – which often results in delays or mistakes that can affect the work of all the sub-contractors who follow.

Arranges for Permits and the Associated Inspections

To ensure a safe community, city permits are required before you or any sub-contractor can demolish, build, enlarge, improve or convert a great many things on your property.

A local general contractor will know which tasks require permits and which don't. He'll be familiar with the process of applying for them and experienced in filling out the paperwork.

The general contractor will also coordinate all of the associated inspections – meeting the city inspectors at the job site and working with them on any requested changes or adjustments.

Do you have what it takes to be your own general contractor? Only you know for sure. Before making a final decision, however, you may want to interview a couple of general contractors to get their assessment of how easy or difficult your project will be.