



Home Address

Building Better Service

Un-Informed Spoons in the Soup

In recent years dozens of well-intended state legislatures have passed regulations regarding construction defects and repair processes. In some cases these state mandated practices included time tables for processing homeowner reports of defects. Many of them included issuing *yet another* version of the same old standards with which we're all familiar, with or without minor tweaks to the measurements used to screen defects and the time frames for which they apply.

Regrettably these efforts treat the symptoms while leaving the causes still at work. To-real and imagined-changes must occur in other parts of the new home process.

Technical Education

The people building homes—builder's supervision and trade crews—must know how to assemble a home correctly. This means regular educational session with manufacturers, engineers, installers, and others who are up-to-date on fundamentals as well as the latest innovation. Especially in the area of green building, such information is essential to proper utilization of materials and techniques. In too many cases, the people in charge of building homes lack even the most rudimentary knowledge.

Quality Management

Effective quality management requires this base of technical knowledge first and second a caring enough attitude to use that knowledge. Third is the practical matter of having the time to apply both. The last requirement is that when conditions are found that need corrections, responsive trades and rigorous follow up ensure that repairs bring the home up to desired standards before work moves to the next phase.

Some companies use third party inspectors to certify the quality of their homes. This step provides a false security. The requirements for outsourced inspections are the same: The inspector must have technical knowledge, must care enough to apply it, and must have the time to perform the task completely. The need for rigorous follow up also applies. Retaining an outside inspection firm merely transfers the challenges to new shoulders, while the responsibility remains with the builder.

Ongoing Improvement

To make the highest and best use of these quality management efforts, routine review and analysis of the items that had to be corrected are essential to eliminating recurring issues. Once identified, resolving these is usually possible, often even easy. This ongoing effort improves the products, reduces costs, and increases home buyer satisfaction.

Buyer Education, Expectation Alignment

Home buyers today vary more in their product needs and knowledge than ever before. To ensure their satisfaction with the new home, the builder's sales team must determine the level of knowledge of the customer and provide needed education to get expectations in line with what will be delivered—both in terms of the home and the after move-in services that come with it. Without accurate alignment of expectations, what occurs after move in can deteriorate into a test of wills, a contest of threats. It is here that those written standards finally come into play if at all—

for their use does little to make clear to buyers what level of quality they can count on having.

The process of educating home buyers requires a good deal more effort than copying and delivering the “fine print”. The topics of maintenance and warranty need to be woven through the building process. Visual tools and repetition make clear what the printed word conveys only superficially. Builders must strive to educate buyers *before* warranty events, not merely point to “industry standards” when a problem is in front of the new homeowner.

Common Sense

In spite of the efforts of the industry and state governments, no one has successfully compiled a listing of everything that might go wrong in a new home. Builders need to educate their employees regarding judgment skills, truly hearing the customer’s point of view, and being prepared to take responsibility even when a technical escape hatch exists. Winning on a technicality may save the repair cost today but does so at the expense of future sales and reputation.

Certainly other goals could be added to this list although just these items, taken together, seem like quite a challenging assignment. When states—or builders themselves—want to get serious about eliminating construction disputes, these are the issues they address. We’ve got enough printed standards. 🙄

The Book Shelf



If time or work flow management is a challenge for you take a look at the work of David Allen. Several books are available and you can sign up for a free on-line newsletter as well at his Website (www.davidco.com) or by emailing your request to customerservice@davidco.com. Allen’s book titles include—

- **Getting Things Done:** *The Art of Stress-Free Productivity*—his first, most basic book. Start here for a new foundation of time management insights and skills (paperback, \$8.63, Kindle, \$10.99 at Amazon). His focus on the importance of identifying the “next step” is the most useful time management insight I’ve ever found.
- **Ready for Anything:** *52 Productivity Principles for Getting Things Done*. This one includes (page 75) “At any moment, giving full attention to the one thing at hand is a hallmark of high performance.” If high performance would give you a better life, invest in this book (paperback, \$10.24, Kindle, \$14.99 at Amazon).
- **Making It All Work:** *Winning at the Game of Work and the Business of Life*. Hints for capturing all of your “stuff” and controlling it, and beginning to trust your own systems (hard back, \$10.38, Kindle, \$12.99 Amazon).