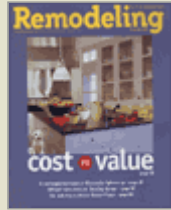


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This Month in 

Enjoy the Trip Put the right systems in place to get that project off the ground and flying high.



By **Tommy Strong**

At Brothers Strong, we think of the term "takeoff" not as an estimate but rather as that point in time when a project is passed from sales to production and a job takes flight. With proper advance work, the hand off can be a smooth one. But adjustments on the fly are as important as all the up-front plans. Your team had better be skilled in reacting to the unseen and unknown.

On large-scale remodeling jobs ? whether large-scale to you is \$20,000 or \$200,000 ? the systems you develop are the only thing to fall back on when surprises hit. Because systems depend on information, the project manager must learn as much as possible in order to monitor certain aspects of the job:

- ⌘ Selections. Everything from floor tile to ceiling paint should be tracked as it's chosen, ordered, delivered, and inspected.
- ⌘ Allowances. When salesmen can't tell what something will cost, use allowances to help stay on course until the final numbers are in.
- ⌘ Scheduling. Knowing the job schedule backward and forward will allow immediate and effective damage control when something goes awry.

Expect the Unexpected

Bad weather, human error, and changes in course should be expected. They're not predictable, necessarily, but they will occur. Response tactics, however, should be very predictable.

The project manager is usually the first to notice incoming trouble. His or her first response should always be the same: either know the answer or know how to get the answer. Most important, tell the client immediately how you propose to solve the problem and how long it will take. Office personnel should jump in with support in documenting changes, monitoring the schedule, and offering management help. It takes a balanced effort between the field and office to respond quickly and productively.

For example, my company has a number of monitoring systems that work for us. One is that tile installation is approved by clients and the project manager (especially complex back-splashes and shower designs)

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immediately after the tiles are set. Mishaps or inconsistencies can be more easily addressed before grouting. Another system deals with specialty products like appliances and custom tub decks. These items are measured and checked anywhere from two to five times before installation. Fixing a problem that eats a day or two of the schedule halfway through the project could save a week later on. One last example is that trade contractors are prepped for a possible follow-up visit after their scope of work is finished. One extra visit may not be necessary, but we build it into the price anyway ? our subs can then afford to give prompt service if we need them again.

Aggressive Foresight as Radar

In remodeling, there is no autopilot. Use aggressive foresight as your radar, and communicate the possibility of turbulence, which will minimize the amount of banging on the cabin door when a wing catches fire.

The final destination is always the same: the completed project. To control the finish date, promise one in advance, show it on the job schedule, and have the final payment tied to "reasonable completion." By collecting change orders along the way and committing to a "no punch out" ethic, it will happen.



Tommy Strong

A big remodeling project is not always a smooth ride, but the memory of a few small storms ? minimized by the focused responses of you and your crew ? can be erased with a soft descent. However, the old adage "any landing you walk away from is a good landing" does not apply. Bring your clients back to earth smoothly, and give them an easy stroll to the departure gate with waves, smiles, and the final check in your pocket. ?*Tommy Strong, CGR, CLC, is the production manager and one of the founders of Brothers Strong, a design/build remodeling company named 2003 Houston Remodeler of the Year.*

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