

## Choosing a Contractor – 25 Factors

At Castle, we believe that education leads to a better understanding of the remodeling process, better relationships between the consumer and the contractor, and ultimately creates a higher level of satisfaction with remodeling projects. To this end, Marty Schirber, CR, authored an informative article to aid consumers in choosing a professional remodeling contractor. Often, the consumer is told only to “get several estimates and to make sure that the contractor is licensed, bonded and insured.” While this is important advice, much more needs to be considered to ensure a successful remodeling project.

Marty Schirber, CR, founded Castle Building & Remodeling, Inc. in 1977. Over the years, Castle has performed over 3500 successful jobs for over 1500 clients.

Loren Schirber, Marty’s son, joined Castle in 2003 and assumed ownership upon Marty’s retirement in 2007. Loren attended the University of North Dakota where he graduated Summa Cum Laude with a Bachelor of Business Administration in Marketing and received a Certificate of Entrepreneurship. After two years in the corporate world, Loren decided to return to Minneapolis to join the family business and to attend the University of Minnesota, Carlson School of Management where he received his MBA in 2005.

In the fall of 2007, Castle hired industry expert Steve George, CR, as General Manager. Steve brings to Castle 28 years of industry experience in virtually every aspect of remodeling, from carpentry to project management to estimating to general management. Castle is proud to have an industry professional join the team and will benefit greatly from his expertise.

In addition to Loren and Steve, Castle’s team includes an office manager and an estimator with a combined total of 47 years of experience in the remodeling industry. Our interior designer has passed the IAQCD test, the most prestigious designation an Interior Designer can achieve. Castle’s Kitchen and Bath Designer has recently finished a one-year training program at Century College and has eight years of industry experience. Our project managers have many years of combined construction experience as well.

True to the core values of Castle, we are always willing and excited to share our knowledge with consumers, regardless of whether they are Castle clients or not. The full article by Marty Schirber, “Choosing a Contractor” can be found on the Castle website at <http://www.castlebri.com/db3.php>. If you do not have access to the web and would like a copy of the article, we would be glad to provide one for you.

Below is a synopsis of what can be found in the article, as well as how Castle rates on each of the 25 categories. As you will see in the full article, ratings are based on four levels: Unacceptable, Good, Better, and Best. We encourage you to use the worksheet to directly compare all contractors with whom you are considering working. Whether you choose Castle or another contractor, we encourage you to be pro-active, to do your homework, and to take all of these factors into consideration.



Definition	Castle			
<p><b>Licensed, Bonded, and Insured</b> The contractor is licensed to practice in the State of Minnesota and carries appropriate insurance coverage in case anything goes wrong with the project.</p>	Best			
<p><b>Price</b> The contractor respects you and your budget and designs the project to fit within these parameters.</p>	Best			
<p><b>Reputation</b> The contractor has a good reputation with past customers, and his customers refer him to friends and family.</p>	Best			
<p><b>Completeness of the Estimate</b> The contractor gives you a detailed estimate and explains all allowances and other costs associated with your project.</p>	Best			
<p><b>The Contract</b> All the necessary facets of the project are spelled out clearly. You won't have any surprises once the job is started.</p>	Best			
<p><b>Level of Experience</b> This is a combination of years in the business, typical projects for the contractor, and whether the contractor has been in business long enough to know where his niche is and what he is good at.</p>	Best			
<p><b>Customer References</b> A good contractor should have a number of good customer references. He should be willing and excited to put you in contact with a past customer to really sell himself and his company to you.</p>	Best			
<p><b>Business Location</b> How close is the contractor's shop or office to you? Working within a defined area can allow a contractor to give more personal attention to each job. This becomes much more difficult if the contractor's office is across town from the project.</p>	Best			
<p><b>Professional References</b> This is important because the way a contractor treats his peers, suppliers, and subcontractors is indicative of the way he treats his customers. He can have an honest, trusting relationship, or a hostile, adversarial one.</p>	Best			
<p><b>Company History</b> Company history refers to the strength of the business and the length of time doing the same business. Good businesses sustain themselves and build while poor businesses struggle to find a niche and reinvent themselves.</p>	Best			
<p><b>Organization on the Job</b> Organization is a major part of a successful remodeling project. The plumbing and electrical work must be completed before the cabinets and countertops can be set in place. Coordination of all the different trades will lead to a smooth project.</p>	Best			
<p><b>Professional Associations</b> This refers to all the professional groups the company leadership belongs to and participates in. These groups are beneficial to help a company stay on the cutting edge of new techniques and materials.</p>	Best			
<p><b>Design Services</b> Design services are most important when changing the shape or layout of a space. For a remodeling contractor to have a designer on staff shows that he is committed to creating the best and most suitable space for your project.</p>	Best			
<p><b>Size of the Company</b> The size of a company can affect the quality of the product. A company that has grown too quickly may not be able to provide the same quality, experience, and attention to detail as a smaller company who has retained the same employees for years.</p>	Best			



Definition	Castle			
<b>Quality of Subcontractors</b> This refers to whether a contractor will consistently call the same plumber, electrician, or other subcontractor each time, or he will just get the lowest bid possible. When a contractor works with the same sub all the time, he gets a good feel for their strengths and weaknesses.	Best			
<b>Job Schedule</b> The contractor is in charge of the scheduling of the job so your home is disrupted as little as possible. This involves ordering materials and coordinating subcontractors to get in, finish their part of the job, and get out.	Best			
<b>Use Employees or Subs</b> When a contractor works with his own carpenters every day for years, he gets a very good idea of their strengths and weaknesses. Contractors who hire employees from a pool of laborers may get new workers on the job every day and he won't know how experienced or qualified the workers will be.	Better			
<b>Communication</b> Communication is very important to a successful remodeling project. A good contractor will be easy to get a hold of and will have systems in place to make sure your wishes are noted and followed. He will also make sure everyone on the jobsite knows what is going on.	Best			
<b>Source of Business</b> Where a contractor's business comes from may be a good indication of how his jobs turn out. If he does good work, chances are good he will be asked back to do the next project. If all his leads are first timers, what does that say about his projects?	Best			
<b>Customer Service</b> Customer service is how well the contractor serves you and your family. This can include communication, keeping appointments, being punctual, and keeping the customer informed at all times. This may also include educating the customer about his options.	Best			
<b>Community Involvement</b> A contractor who is proud of his community and the work he has done will often be involved in community leadership. This shows that he and his company have a commitment to the community and want to be active commercial citizens and continue to improve the neighborhood.	Best			
<b>Creativity</b> Creativity is an important skill in the remodeling business. Often a contractor is faced with a homeowner who doesn't know what he wants. In this situation, it is up to the contractor to solve the problem and make the space "work."	Best			
<b>Guarantees and Warranties</b> Minnesota law mandates that contractors warranty their work for a specified period of time, so technically all contractors have warranties. A good contractor will clearly spell out his warranty in his contract and will provide the homeowner with the expiration dates.	Best			
<b>Craftsmanship</b> Craftsmanship and attention to detail are very important to make a project fit into your home. Simple details like matching trim and windows can really make a project look like it has always been a part of your home.	Best			
<b>Jobsite Clean up</b> Remodeling by nature can be dusty, smelly, or even have dangerous particles or fumes. The way a remodeling company handles clean up can determine how much of an effect a remodeling project will have on your home and family.	Best			

