

# GETTING THE RESULTS YOU PAID FOR

YOU'VE CREATED STANDARD WORK SPECIFICATIONS. NOW YOU NEED TO MAKE SURE PEOPLE FOLLOW THEM. PART TWO IN A TWO-PART SERIES

By Richard Baker

Last month's column discussed the role standard work specifications can play in lowering warranty costs and suggested ways to create those standards. But standards only have value when workers follow them. To ensure that happens, you must train crews and check results.

## SETTING A REALISTIC TIMETABLE

In the end, you want everyone on your jobs installing the required products and following installation checklists. Reaching that goal depends in part on the size of the builder. A regional or national company that builds in several communities may have dozens of independent subcontractors, each of which has to learn new ways of doing things.

The good news is that this is a well-worn path, with some national builders successfully implementing standard work specifications, with regional variations where necessary, across dozens of metro areas. Every site supervisor understands the standards, whether they're in Southern California or Northern New Jersey. All subs must complete and sign the checklists, as must all third-party home inspectors. This builds a culture of shared expectations.

How long does it take to get everyone onboard? On a recent proposal for a national builder to create standard work specs for a half-dozen building assemblies, we figured about 18 months to create standards and train installers in all markets. That timetable was for a corporate structure with multiple divisions, each operating as a relatively autonomous business unit. In contrast, a local builder completing 50 homes per year should be able to create and implement the same standards in a few months.

## INVOLVING SUBS EARLY ON

The main roadblock is natural human resistance to change. The mere fact that a builder pays attention to these details

can create conflict, as workers and subs find themselves held to what they see as (but what may not actually be) higher expectations. Some subs may respond in unexpected ways. If the new stucco checklist specifies self-furring lath, the builder will expect a higher lath price but will be surprised if the installer wants to charge for a thicker coat of stucco. If the builder assumed that that thickness was being installed all along, some uncomfortable discussions may be needed to sort it out.

You can minimize these conflicts by involving select subs in defining standards and by helping them understand that more consistent quality will benefit them. At the same time, however, you also need to include some accountability.

Builders take various approaches to this. In the stucco example, you could spot-check thickness on randomly selected homes. If you have concerns about the quality of your concrete flatwork, you could ask for batch tickets from the concrete supplier. The advantage of the latter is that it's less confrontational. If there's a problem, such as too much water in the mix, the concrete supplier will be motivated to correct it, improving the strength and durability of the finished product.

Another tactic is to scrutinize variance purchase orders. If the framer runs short on 2x4s, the builder may start requiring that the purchase order explain why they're short. This simple step can reduce cost overruns by a percent or more.

Many builders ease into this by implementing a few critical processes at first, then using the lessons learned to make implementation smoother going forward. But regardless of how fast or slow you proceed, the best way to stay motivated is to remember the rewards for seeing the work through: lower warranty costs, happier customers, and more profit. **PB**

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