

Professional Remodeler®

SALES ALL-STARS

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Secrets of Sales

★ All-Stars ★

Expert tips from 15 leading salespeople in the remodeling industry

BY TIM GREGORSKI, EDITOR IN CHIEF

Which characteristics and skills make up a remodeling sales all-star? Does it include in-depth knowledge of a product line, the ability to take a sales lead and turn the lead into a contract, or does it come down to the amount of revenue generated from a sale?

“Whenever an interaction between two or more parties takes place, for the purpose of establishing new ideas, exchanging goods or services, or the development of a relationship, some form of selling will occur and the skills of the salesperson will determine the outcome,” says Dave Yoho, president, Dave Yoho Associates.

What about their personality, intellect, and ability to develop a long-term relationship with a homeowner?

“The best remodeling salespeople are very curious and genuinely interested in their clients, non-judgmental about the client’s pains or preferences, and excellent at getting introduced to all

the neighbors,” says Chip Doyle, sales force development expert, Sandler Training.

What about experience? Do you want to teach sales to a construction expert or teach construction to a sales expert (to find out this answer, see “Selling Tips and Strategies,” page 20)?

Professional Remodeler interviewed a diverse group of remodeling salespeople from large and small firms across the country to find out their different sales philosophies, how to handle the relationship with potential and existing clients, and finally, their secrets to closing a sale.

To represent the different sectors of the remodeling industry, we’ve separated the article into two segments: full service/design-build and specialty/replacement. These tips are not only intended to help your business increase sales, they also are useful in helping you field and increase the results for your team of sales all-stars.

2014 SALES ALL-STARS



Marilou Arcuri

Kitchen and Bath Designer
Alure Home Improvements,
Plainview, N.Y.
Years of Experience: 20
2013 Sales: \$2,200,000
2014 Projected Sales:
\$2,400,000
2014 Average Sale:
\$48,000



Joy Branch

Senior Sales Consultant
Exovations, Atlanta, Ga.
Years of Experience: 10
2013 Sales: \$1,689,687
2014 Projected Sales:
\$1,673,000
2014 Average Sale:
\$16,000



Adam Clark

VP of Business
Development and Sales
Choice Construction,
Gig Harbor, Wash.
Years of Experience: 7
2013 Sales: \$1,140,643
2014 Projected Sales:
\$2,100,000
2014 Average Sale:
\$85,208



Gregory M. Griffin

Designer and Sales
Consultant
Alure Home Improvements,
Plainview, N.Y.
Years of Experience: 14
2013 Sales: \$1,860,713
2014 Projected Sales:
\$1,700,000
2014 Average Sale:
\$41,504



Botond Laszlo

Owner and President
Marvelous Home
Makeovers, Plano, Texas
Years of Experience: 10
2013 Sales: \$720,000
2014 Projected Sales:
\$800,000
2014 Average Sale:
\$43,000



Brandon LeRoy

Partner
Jackson & LeRoy
Remodeling, Salt Lake
City, Utah
Years of Experience: 14
2013 Sales: \$12,316,000
2014 Projected Sales:
\$14,100,000
2014 Average Sale:
\$1,000,000



Luke Panek

Sales Representative
Lindus Construction,
Baldwin, Wis.
Years of Experience: 17
2013 Sales: \$2,200,000
2014 Projected Sales:
\$2,400,000
2014 Average Sale:
\$15,000

Full-Service/Design Build

Q: WHAT ROLE DOES EMOTION PLAY IN THE SALES PROCESS?

Troy Pavelka, Design Manager, Normandy Remodeling

Owners can be very emotional in the selling situation. As a salesperson, I play the role of counselor to balance their emotions while keeping them focused on how we are solving their problems and creating value. This is important to understand because these are emotional decisions, not investments.

Randi Reed, Design Consultant/Sales, Neil Kelly Co.

I tend to get very involved with my clients' lives. Their home is their haven and we spend a lot of time in their personal space. It can be very emotional seeing an existing space become new again. My goal is for our team to treat the client's home as if it were their own. I discuss this often during the sales process and explain the steps we go through to protect their home.

Marilou Arcuri, Kitchen and Bath Designer, Alure Home Improvements

Whether fixing a potential hazard, updating a tired, outdated room, or re-designing the space to achieve a better floor plan for the family, a residential remodel weighs heavily on emotion. Most clients cannot visualize the project and potential options. I get clients to relate to their needs during the first meeting by educating them on the different products available or through sketches of design options so they can make decisions easily.

Adam Clark, VP of Business Development and Sales, Choice Construction

Over the years, we've had prospects who listen to their emotions during the buying process. It's important to establish a strong relationship first, then focus on appealing to emotional or analytical traits of the specific prospect to close the sale. Emotions drive decisions and it's up to us to understand the client's emotions and how it translates to the remodeling project.

Ann Stockard, Residential Designer, Normandy Design Build Remodeling

Emotion plays a significant role in the sales process. While some people

are very analytical about the buying process and want to know every detail before they move ahead with a decision, there are other people whose decisions are based almost purely on emotion.

Ultimately, it's important to adapt my sales process to suit the personality of the homeowner. If they are analytical then I become analytical, if they are highly emotionally driven, then I focus on the creative aspects of the design. Regardless of the path I take to help them realize their remodeling goals, managing the emotion involved in deciding to modify a home is a critical function of my job in sales.

Botond Laszlo, Owner and President, Marvelous Home Makeovers

People are emotional when it comes to their home. This is where they build memories, keep their family safe, and it is a reflection of their personality. When you point out deficiencies or areas of improvement you risk calling their baby ugly, so you have to be very tactful in the conversation.

Brandon LeRoy, Partner, Jackson & LeRoy Remodeling

We work closely and efficiently with a team of outside architects and interior designers. Our objective is to make the client feel heard and understood. Once this happens, we're able to incorporate their dreams into a design that exceeds their expectations. With three team members (architect, interior designer, and ourselves), we're not only able to excite the client about the design but we also validate that energy with multiple confirmations. This team approach makes the sales process enjoyable and successful. So yes, emotions play a vital role in the sale process.

Chris Risher, Principal, RisherMartin Fine Homes

My nature is to always want to help someone, even if it is not the right project for our firm. It is critical to only take on projects that you can be successful at executing. This includes everything from geographic location, correct personality match, the right design professional attached to the project, and the correct budget. If my team and I cannot check all of these boxes, I work hard at trying to send the homeowner to someone who can.



Troy Pavelka

Design Manager
Normandy Remodeling,
Hinsdale, Ill.
Years of Experience: 12
2013 Sales: \$1,606,637
2014 Projected Sales:
\$2,000,000
2014 Average Sale:
\$114,000



Randi Reed

Design Consultant/Sales
Neil Kelly Co.,
Portland, Ore.
Years of Experience: 41
2013 Sales: \$1,400,000
2014 Projected Sales:
\$1,000,000
2014 Average Sale:
\$121,149



Chris Risher

Principal
RisherMartin Fine Homes,
Austin, Texas
Years of Experience: 5
2013 Sales: \$2,960,000
2014 Projected Sales:
\$3,200,000
2014 Average Sale:
\$350,000



Paul Skivington

Sales Consultant
Legacy Remodeling,
Pittsburgh, Pa.
2013 Sales: \$1,100,000
2014 Projected Sales:
\$1,200,000
2014 Average Sale:
\$11,183



Ann Stockard

Residential Designer
Normandy Design Build
Remodeling, Hinsdale, Ill.
Years of Experience: 8
Your 2013 Sales:
\$850,000
Your 2014 Projected Sales:
\$950,000
2014 Average Sale:
\$75,000



Molly N. Switzer

Design and Sales
Consultant
Precision Countertops,
Wilsonville, Ore.
Years of Experience: 10
2013 Sales: \$1,040,809
2014 Projected Sales:
\$1,251,683
2014 Average Sale: \$2,717



Ken Ware

Sales Manager
Mosby Building Arts,
St. Louis, Mo.
Years of Experience: 10
2013 Sales: \$10,800,000
2014 Projected Sales:
\$13,100,000
2014 Average Sale:
\$26,350



Grant Winstead

General Sales Manager
Tower Construction,
Columbia, Md.
Years of Experience: 30
2013 Sales: \$1,500,000
2014 Projected Sales:
\$2,000,000
2014 Average Sale:
\$15,000

Q: WHEN YOU RECEIVE PUSHBACK OR RESISTANCE FROM THE CLIENT, HOW DO YOU RESPOND TO ENSURE THE SALES PROCESS CONTINUES SMOOTHLY?

Ann Stockard, Residential Designer, Normandy Design Build Remodeling

When a homeowner pushes back or offers resistance, I listen closely to their concerns to understand the underlying issues at hand. That may mean I need to acknowledge a worry and address it head-on, or it may take additional questions to understand their hesitation. Also, it may be a matter of doing a better job explaining options and solutions so the homeowner feels they are in the driver's seat and not being pushed into making an uncomfortable decision.

Botond Laszlo, Owner and President, Marvelous Home Makeovers

It is important to create a relationship of trust. The sale is just the beginning of the relationship, so it is important to be on the same page. Part of this is understanding where and why the pushback exists in the first place. Words may not accurately reflect the source, so we talk through the discomfort with the client to get to the root issue. It is just a matter of explaining things a different way or pointing out it is a two-way relationship and open communication is critical for a successful project.

Brandon LeRoy, Partner, Jackson & LeRoy Remodeling

We attribute some of our success to always returning the conversation back to solutions we've created for the needs and wants the client shared with us in the beginning. It's rare when a client contacts us and has a perfect alignment of dreams and budget. To circumvent resistance due to cost, we refocus our words and energy to the dreams that started the whole process.

Troy Pavelka, Design Manager, Normandy Remodeling

We have to find out the reason behind the pushback. This starts from the first interaction by establishing trust. The stronger the foundation of the relationship, the more likely the client will share the root of the resistance. It is important to get buy-in along the way to avoid the pushback at the point of sale. We recognize with big-ticket purchases, clients need a moment to talk privately. When we sense this, it's important to stand up from the meeting, walk away, and give them a minute. Not offer it, but give it.

Chris Risher, Principal, RisherMartin Fine Homes

I have to make sure expectations are set correctly from the beginning. If they are calling us based on a referral, we have to explain to them why the project they want to emulate went so well. If we deviate from those plans, it has to be clear a different result will occur. At the end of the meeting, it has to be decided what the next step will be and whether or not the next step is even needed. We have to respond to different needs, but if the pushback breaks our system or core values, we probably aren't the best fit for them.

Randi Reed, Design Consultant/Sales, Neil Kelly Co.

I take the client back to the initial reason they contacted us. I ask if their needs have changed during the design process. If so, we make a plan to accommodate the new design requirements.

Marilou Arcuri, Kitchen and Bath Designer, Alure Home Improvements

Most of the time, a client is reluctant to move forward due to fear of not choosing the right contractor or designer, and not knowing how much money to spend on a project. Trying to put the homeowners at ease is my goal. In the beginning, I take a retainer based on three designs—one dream design, a budget-friendly design, and finally a blend of both. This often helps their comfort level. When the project is ready for contract, the homeowner can feel the need to pull back rather than pull the trigger. If the project is the right decision for them, I may also offer discounts and rebates. Having worked out special promotions with many of our vendors, we can pass along time-sensitive savings to clients. Being able to offer substantial savings that may only be available in a particular month can sway a client into moving forward.

Adam Clark, VP of Business Development and Sales, Choice Construction

We use the pushback or resistance as a state of direction, it helps us know what the prospect wants out of the project. We'll spend more time educating the homeowner as opposed to offering discounts. Our sales process is configured to work closely with prospects designing for their budget. We work open book so homeowners can impact pricing along the way.

Q: DESCRIBE A PROVEN "SALES SECRET" YOU FIND MOST EFFECTIVE FOR CLOSING A SALE.

Botond Laszlo, Owner and President, Marvelous Home Makeovers

Be honest when giving the client feedback on their request and expectations. We are not afraid to tell the client what they are asking for will not meet their expectations. We then offer suggestions as to why and what will better suit their expectations. By not agreeing to every request, it helps our clients see we care about the end product and want it to be right for them.

Adam Clark, VP of Business Development and Sales, Choice Construction

From the very first meeting, we spend time educating the prospect about our process and when to anticipate different mile-markers. We build rapport and trust by smoothly and efficiently walking them through each step. When the time comes to sign an agreement, all questions have been answered and we're ready to move on to the fun stuff—the construction.

Ann Stockard, Residential Designer, Normandy Design Build Remodeling

Two of the aspects I focus on in my sales presentations are creating enthusiasm and earning trust. Enthusiasm is contagious, and when you are excited about their project, the client will follow your lead. The second matter of building trust is not something that can be easily explained. For me, it comes down to keeping my word and following through with everything I say I will do. Whether it's alleviating fears by taking homeowners to a job in progress or delving into the details of the proposed solution by demonstrating how their problem was solved in the past, I become the advocate for a successful renovation.

Brandon LeRoy, Partner, Jackson & LeRoy Remodeling

The best sales secret we can offer is to simply ask for the close. People in

general don't like to beat around the bush and appreciate simple and direct conversations and requests.

Chris Risher, Principal, RisherMartin Fine Homes

Renovating a home is a very personal and giant leap for many people. You have to make a personal connection with the client, and they have to value your contribution to the team. Furthermore, if you are interviewing against other firms, it is always great to go last. You can ask the client what type of firms you are competing against, what they like and dislike about those firms, and you can then decide whether or not you can fill those gaps.

Marilou Arcuri, Kitchen and Bath Designer, Alure Home Improvements

Before I go over pricing, I want to make sure they feel comfortable with every aspect of the job, how the job will be executed, design, products, etc. Then, and only then, do I feel confident to move into the contract.

Troy Pavelka, Design Manager, Normandy Remodeling

I have found it all starts with trust and providing the right thoughtful solution to the client's problems. People want to work with someone they trust and see themselves relating with. This starts with the first interaction and every email, meeting, phone call, Pinterest, and Houzz exchange thereafter. We recognize the client is buying from the designer/salesperson and not the

company. The company is great back up, but it's the person from whom they are buying that is key to the sales process. It is not uncommon a client requires a nudge at the point of sale. We must be ready to ask for the sale and sometimes give a nudge to reassure they are making a good decision.

Randi Reed, Design Consultant/Sales, Neil Kelly Co.

I always have all of my bases covered. I plan for all of the questions that might arise and I am prepared with answers at closing.

SPECIALTY/REPLACEMENT CONTRACTOR

Q: DESCRIBE THE PHILOSOPHY THAT DRIVES YOUR SALES PRESENTATION AND HOW IT DOES DIFFER FROM THE COMPETITION.

Grant Winstead, General Sales Manager, Tower Construction

The homeowner is the most important element of our business. I don't set out to sell our customer, only educate them to make an intelligent decision. In most cases, our information and knowledge surpasses the competition.

Molly N. Switzer Design and Sales Consultant, Precision Countertops

I spend time listening to my clients and ask them questions to discover



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what they envision for the project. I educate my clients on products and the different options available without overwhelming them with useless knowledge. The more I get to know a client's wants, needs, and interests, the better the project will come together.

Gregory M. Griffin, Designer and Sales Consultant, Alure Home Improvements

You must have the ability to place yourself in the client's shoes, be compassionate to what they need, and be prepared to support and follow through on everything you say. Do not be afraid to say, "I don't know." The respect you receive from being humble enough to admit you are not sure about something, but have the willingness to seek out the appropriate answer, is a skill. You become a solutions person at that point.

Ken Ware, Sales Manager, Mosby Building Arts

Our sales presentation is focused on why a remodeling project matters to the client and how it benefits them to buy from us. The competition does not focus on the client rather on the success of their business. Of course, this is not relevant to the client.

Paul Skivington, Sales Consultant, Legacy Remodeling

Staying on the customer's agenda is my philosophy. In order to write the proper contract, I need to listen to the homeowner's needs to find out how

we can help them. This sets us apart from the competition because we don't come into their home with one product and a pushy sales process trying to sell what works best for us.

Luke Panek, Sales Representative, Lindus Construction

It's easy to mumble out the same sales presentation over and over again like a robot. A good presentation is customized to each homeowner based on the primary concerns they have. Practice makes perfect. Present to a friend who doesn't know anything about construction and have them give you feedback. Move quickly, but spend extra time on the areas they are most concerned about.

Joy Branch, Senior Sales Consultant, Exovations

Many people selling a product or service have a script or presentation so well memorized they can do it in their sleep. This method of selling should have died long ago, as any intuitive client will see such a presentation as what it is: a sales pitch and nothing else. A sales presentation should have only one thing constant and that is change. My personal philosophy for selling is to learn about my client, not the presentation. Every person is unique. Their priorities, needs, wants, personalities, and budgets are different. How then could any sales presentation be the same when no client or situation ever is?

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Q: WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED FROM OTHER INDUSTRIES THAT CAN BE APPLIED TO YOUR CURRENT SALES TECHNIQUES?

Paul Skivington, Sales Consultant, Legacy Remodeling

I spent time in the restaurant industry. What I learned was it didn't matter how good the food or the prices are, people come in for the service. So it doesn't matter if I have the best products and installers in the business. If I give the customer bad service, they won't tell their friends about us or come back to purchase again.

Luke Panek, Sales Representative, Lindus Construction

The common denominator in all industries is people. Building relationships is the core of any successful sales career. It really doesn't matter if you're selling coffee cups or toothbrushes, at some point someone has to buy. The ability to develop relationships quickly is the real skill.

Joy Branch, Senior Sales Consultant, Exovations

My background as a Realtor has been extremely helpful in giving practical, honest feedback to a client planning a project and considering the impact this change will have when they sell their home. Asking someone for their business comes natural when they feel they can trust you. A product is often capable of selling itself. When most people decide to sign a contract, the greatest satisfaction comes in knowing they have chosen to work with my company. I've not only earned their business but, more importantly, their trust.

Grant Winstead, General Sales Manager, Tower Construction

I am a professional just like a doctor or a lawyer. I am there to service my customer in a professional manner. My sales techniques come from me being a professional just like other educated professionals.

Molly N. Switzer Design and Sales Consultant, Precision Countertops

I've been in sales for as long as I can remember, and there has always been the understanding to seek the needs of the client first and listen to their story. Getting to know your client will allow you to successfully close your sale and achieve the best project possible.

Gregory M. Griffin, Designer and Sales Consultant, Alure Home Improvements

In a prior life I was in a medical consulting field, and I would say that attention to detail is important. Clearly in the home improvement world, this is critical to a successful project. On a wider scale, what's interesting about the home improvement field is the tremendous diversity in the client base both professionally and culturally. When you engage with a management consultant, accountant, or a chemist, for example, you learn things about these industries from the people you are consulting. They are open about best practices and if you take your ego out of the equation, you will learn something and find the common line on how to apply those best practices, whether its ethics or how you analyze a problem into your sales technique. I've learned about effective listening, policy, and protocols in certain industries. Keeping an open mind and learning about other industries not only improves your approach, it allows you to engage the management consultant, accountant, or chemist the second time around because you know something about them and therefore have something in common.

Q: DESCRIBE A PROVEN "SALES SECRET" YOU FIND MOST EFFECTIVE FOR CLOSING A SALE.

Ken Ware, Sales Manager, Mosby Building Arts

Follow up. Buyer's remorse can influence a client after the sale, especially if they talk to family and friends. We follow up to reassure the client they made the right choice and to keep the dialogue going.

Gregory M. Griffin, Designer and Sales Consultant, Alure Home Improvements

I would have to say great listening with an open mind and from a position of strength. It seems obvious, but when someone needs a product or service, if you ever drill down on why a client had such a great experience, you will hear, "They really listened to what I had to say and addressed all of my concerns," or "They were there for me through the whole process."

What a happy client is really saying is the consultant made a commitment to listen. Listen to the client's concerns, listen for solutions for that client, and be ready to listen for as long as it takes. Also, communicate with the client to make sure there was nothing else that you missed or didn't hear. You fill the client needs with solutions and services that you were able to find when you really listened to the client as opposed to what you thought might work—that's the open-minded part.

Paul Skivington, Sales Consultant, Legacy Remodeling

Listen to your customers and prescribe the right solutions. Then, the secret is as simple as asking them for their business.

Joy Branch, Senior Sales Consultant, Exovations

Being client-focused is the secret to success in sales. If there is one secret I routinely use, it is honesty is the best policy. I often establish credibility by suggesting options my client had not considered, which may effectively decrease the cost of the project. This is a crazy technique until you hear clients say, "We feel most comfortable with you and want to work with your company." Such honesty in closing a deal will reward any good salesperson with not only the present business, but also the promise of future opportunities as well. I am always trying to lead people to the closing table, but never pushing them. I want them to remember buying from me, not being sold by me.

Luke Panek, Sales Representative, Lindus Construction

Above all, trust trumps everything. However, I'm pretty sure it's no secret. The person who establishes trust wins; the secret is how to establish it. Trust is built on relationships. Establishing common ground is the best way to start the relationship. Connect with the homeowner, get them to talk about themselves, or have them teach you something. Listen and learn how, why, and when.

Grant Winstead, General Sales Manager, Tower Construction

People often ask me how do I sell so many jobs, whether replacement or design-build. The answer relies on you. By that, I mean know the people whom you are selling to as well as their buying habits. Read your customer's needs correctly and answer their question from your heart, be honest and direct with them, know your products, and the homeowner will appreciate the sincerity and will reward your honesty with a sale. **PR**