

Hiring the Wrong Contractor can be a **Nightmare** Costing you Grief, Stress, Money and Peace of Mind

By **Dan Howard**
for TRIB TOTAL MEDIA



Sure, he seemed nice, promised a good job and really talked like he knew what he was doing. He may have even had a pocketful of good reviews on the internet. Cheap, yep, he was cheap too. Past that, you needed the job done and he is available.

According to the Better Business Bureau, PA Attorney General, and just about every other consumer protection group, home improvement contractors rate as one of the leading sources of consumer complaints. A bad contractor can leave you with a terrible job and costing you more to correct than the contract amount in the first place.



107 Arch Street
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The faces of *integrity* at
NORTHWOOD
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New Listing!
Etna
Private home with easy access to all of North Hills and short commute to downtown Pittsburgh. Charming 3 bedroom home has it all! Original wood trim, a log burning fireplace, and French doors from the dining room to the living room. 3 floor detached garage with water and electric. The yard is 2 lots, tree lined well kept, and private. Newer roof, HVAC, water heater, AC, electrical and windows.

\$90,000 ML#1056705



Reduced!
Wayne-Twp
Plant your roots here in this nappy home! So much to love in this 4 bedroom split entry. Numerous updates including, freshly painted interior rooms, completely renovated bathroom, newly replaced living room, stairs & hallway carpet, new vinyl floor in kitchen & dining, replaced windows & roof. Great storage space plus an extra detached garage. Beautifully nestled on 2.25 wooded acres & 20 minutes from Kittanning!

\$159,500 ML#1055985



New Listing!
Manor-Twp
Looking for a newly renovated home with lots of room to roam. Here it is!! 4 bedroom home is completely redone from all new hardwood flooring, new custom made kitchen with granite countertops, and all new carpet. Every room in this house was updated and upgraded. Open floor plan makes this home perfect for entertaining. Brand new French doors lead to the back patio.

\$282,500 ML#1055619



New Listing!
Ford City-Boro
If you are looking for a well kept 3 bedroom home in town with a detached garage you need to check this house out!! Many updates include newer roof, boiler system, hot water tank paint and a garage. Inside flooring has been totally redone to really accent all this home has to offer. Fenced in yard for little ones or pets.

\$79,900 ML#1055145



Reduced!
Manor-Twp
3 bedroom ranch with a country setting is awaiting new owners! This house has so much to offer, with a little TLC this house would be great for a first time home buyer. Hardwood flooring is under the wall to wall carpet.

\$69,900 ML#1044997



Reduced!
Worthington
This sweet little beauty is something special & move in ready!! Owners added a fabulous back deck, accessible thru sliding glass doors in the second bedroom, that provides outdoor dining & relaxation. Neutral interior, hardwood floors, updated kitchen/bath & lower level family area make this home exceptional & worth a look.

\$84,000 ML#1027657

Prequalify Potential Contractors

The last three contractors I was asked about after they botched a job had one thing in common. They did not have the required state license. Go to hicsearch.attorneygeneral.gov and confirm that the company is licensed before even speaking with a contractor.

Never, ever use a contractor that comes unsolicited to the your door. It is almost always a situation that will not end well for the consumer. This story starts with a knock at a door and ends with bad work and the homeowner's money and the contractor leaving town.

Do not beg a contractor to work for you. If they do not call you back when you ask for a quote, they will not call you back when there is a problem. If they are late or a "no show" for an appointment, they will not be on time when they are supposed to be working at your home. If the initial contact goes like a bad date, move on to someone who cares enough to treat you right.

The best references are through people you know. Ask a neighbor, co-worker, friend from your church or at your child's soccer game. The bottom line is that you want a referral from someone who has had real life experience with the person you are about to trust with your home and money.

Ask to see a "Project Book." If a contractor is experienced and takes pride in their work, they will have a project book showing prior projects. When discussing your project, ask for pictures of their current job. A contractor can take a picture on a phone and show you how they leave a home at the end of the day .

Interview the contractor

No matter what you want to think, if there are Spiderman like "Spidey Sense" warnings about working with someone, you should heed the warning. The relationship will not get better when the contractor has the leverage of your money and access to your home.

Take Your Time and Go Over Details of the Proposal Before Your Sign



The important details of the contract such as the scope of work, type of materials and payment terms are fundamental items we all know to look for in a contract. To protect yourself, you should go much further and include the items that will become more important than you can imagine during the actual project. This goes far beyond the physical scope of the project. Remember, get it in writing! "The faintest of ink is far more powerful than the strongest of promises".

Start date: Without a start date, it could be months or even years before you can initiate any action if the contractor fails to start your job.

End date for the project: Allow more time than you think it should take. Every project takes longer than you and your contractor will think it will. However, if your contractor does a "Houdini" on you, you need a drop dead finish date to go after the bum for not finishing your job.

Establish how "extras" will be handled: "Extras" are one of the biggest nightmares of a job. My best suggestion is adding the provision: "extras must be agreed in price and detail before they are performed, or there will no charge." I assure you that will save a lot of stress and unfair expense at the end of the project. It is better to negotiate price before the work is done.

Hours of work: When does the day start, when does it end, what days of the week will work be done? Will work be continuous once started? What are the provisions for exceptions? Include provision of when and how you will be informed of changes in plans. They will happen.

How bathroom access will work: Let me tell you, this can be an important and personal issue for a homeowner.

Utility issues: Determine access to utilities and how interruptions in service will be handled.

Site cleanup at the end of each day: Dirt, nails, open roofs, unlocked doors and a host of other details will become very important to you.

Exactly define stage payments: You do not want to be in the position of being forced to write a check when a stage payment goal is reached by skipping important preliminary work.

Get a written warranty: Define what is covered and for how long. The land mine here is avoiding the contractor weaseling out of a warranty call by blaming the materials he suggested and installed

Obtain a Workman's Compensation and General Liability insurance certificate: Their insurance agent will provide these



upon request with no cost to the contractor. You do not want sued by workmen or a neighbor whose property your contractor damaged.

Define who is responsible for obtaining and paying for permits and inspections. Homeowners can be made to tear out work that was not properly permitted and inspected.

If you are like most people, your home, privacy and security are important to you and the construction process is personal and invasive. Do not be afraid to ask advice from people you know and trust. Second opinions are usually a good option. Being pushed or bullied into quick decision is more often than not, a very bad place to be.

"...home improvement contractors rate as one of the leading sources of consumer complaints."

Go to www.EnviroSpect.info/HiringContractor for more links to consumer protection sites and additional information about hiring a contractor.

Dan Howard is the owner of EnviroSpect. For environmental consultation call 724 443-6653. For more information visit their website at www.EnviroSpect.com Email questions to: Dan@EnviroSpect.com. Like us on Facebook or connect @DanHoward251.



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Rob Iseman



Buffalo Township



Winfield Township



Buffalo Township



Middlesex Township



Allegheny Township



Manor Township

Newer well maintained ranch on 1.88 acre lot. Features open kit & DR w/sliding glass door to back yard, LR open to kit & DR, MB w/full bath, jacuzzi tub & separate shower. Laminate flrs throughout, ceramic tile in baths & 1st flr laundry. LL could easily be finished & is plumbed for a full bath. Cov 30x6 front porch.

Jon Doerr
\$199,900

Enjoy the country setting! Features a nice sized LR open to DR w/sliding glass door leading to cov 16x10 deck overlooking the 24 pool w/deck & 1.97 acre lot. Plastered walls & ceilings, thermo-pane windows, double closet & full bath in the main BR, FR w/wood burner & bar, Cov 17x13 concrete patio & 28x24 2 sty workshop.

Jon Doerr
\$199,900

Well maintained brick ranch on a corner lot. Convenient location - easy access to Rt. 28 and Pittsburgh. Freeport Schools. 3rd Bedroom currently being used as a dining room. Finished lower level. Level yard with gazebo. Covered front porch and back deck. Great starter or retirement home.

Hutterer/Stahl
\$159,900

Custom built home located on a beautifully landscaped 1 acre lot. Open flr plan w/custom Manor House kit, center island, breakfast area & sunroom leading to the back yard. FR features flr to ceiling brick gas FP. Owner's suite features tray ceiling, his/her walk-in closets, & private bath w/Ultra Thermo-Masseur tub. Much to see!

Hutterer/Stahl
\$419,900

Investment opportunity! This building offers a first floor store front with a spacious show room and storage. Second floor has a fully equipped 3 bedroom, 2 bath apartment. Plenty of parking and a large back yard with a deck off the apartment.

Brenda Berger
\$99,900

HUGE income producing property w/ business. Building currently has 8-9 units including store front. 5 1 BR apts, 1 2-3 BR apt, 1 smaller unit used as store front. 1 Unit used as office for store & 2,000 sq.ft commercial store front which is used as a pet store. The pet store business is included & is being sold turn key w/all equip & inventory. The store has 3 separate entrances & can be used as is or split & leased out separate.

Rob Iseman
\$170,000

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