

A Post-Job Survey Equals More Work!



BY GARRETT J. SULLIVAN

Being in the construction business is like owning a tiger. You bid a job, organize it, build it and then go out and find another. Similarly, you can keep a tiger happy as long as you are feeding it, but if you don't have enough food when it gets hungry again, you'll be next on its menu.

Contractors need jobs just as tigers need food. You need to keep your job backlog full 365 days a year to hold the tiger at bay. One way to accumulate jobs (or "food") in your pipeline is to keep customers extremely satisfied.

Successful contractors are usually cost-conscious contractors. However, those that allocate resources to the pursuit of customer satisfaction often score repeat business. As such, you should be willing to spend—albeit prudently—in order to retain customers in the long term.

Do you hear these remarks from clients?

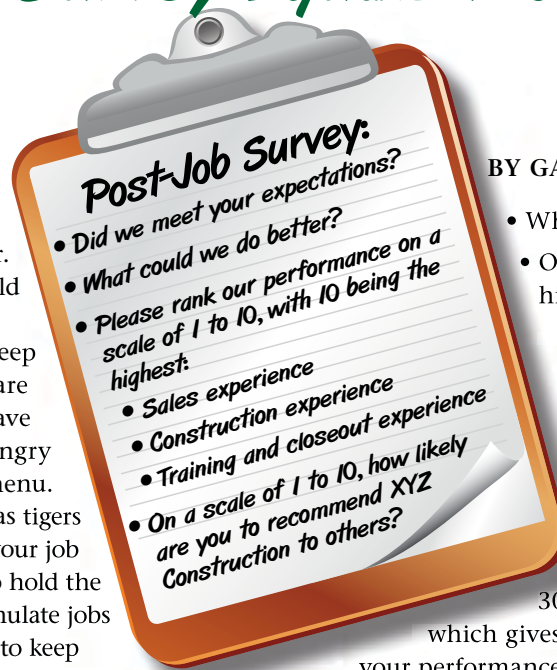
- "You don't have enough men on this job."
- "You didn't answer my email (or call) yesterday."
- "You need to keep a cleaner job site."
- "You never show up when you say you will."
- "You didn't protect the adjacent areas from damage."
- "Did you complete your own punch list first?"

If you're hearing these often, rest assured you will not be high on their list for the next job. Consider one way that great restaurants provide you with extraordinary experiences: the constant monitoring of service and food quality. If there's something wrong with your experience, they'll gladly replace the food or discount the meal. Is this how you are approaching your customers?

If not, start conducting Post-Job Surveys to improve your chances of getting a callback for the next job. Occasionally, contractors will mail out Post-Job Surveys or use a service such as Survey Monkey. However, these rarely provide meaningful feedback and are never as effective as making direct contact with the owner or his or her representative.

Here are some questions you might want to include in your Post-Job Survey:

- Did we meet your expectations?



- What could we do better?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest, please rank our performance in:
 - Sales experience
 - Construction experience
 - Training and closeout experience
- On a scale of 1 to 10, how likely are you to recommend XYZ Construction to others?

The sweet spot for the survey is 30 to 45 days after the job's completion, which gives the owner sufficient time to evaluate your performance. The cover letter should be addressed to the highest-level person that can provide accurate feedback. Ideally, you should request a meeting to go over the survey. By meeting directly, you are signaling to them that "your opinion matters and I care."

The survey also serves as an assessment for your senior management team and can direct them toward becoming more customer focused. Additionally, it can initiate a "tool box" talk with the field personnel to highlight needed improvements or praise them for a job well done.

Here are some suggestions to improve customer satisfaction:

- Tie your compensation policy to the Post-Job Survey ratings.
- Provide customer satisfaction training for your office and field staff on a regular basis.
- Speak consistently about the importance of providing a positive customer experience and acknowledge when you see it.
- Eliminate policies that diminish customer satisfaction—for instance, a rule allowing only management to talk to owners on the job site.
- Ensure everyone has the authority to do whatever it takes (within reason) to satisfy the client.

Studies show that gaining new customers will cost you five to seven times as much as retaining existing ones. Increase your profit by paying close attention to clients' needs and wants. Let them be your biggest advocate in the community.

When you make customers your primary focus, they will return to you again and again. Besides keeping you profitable, it also means not worrying constantly about feeding the tiger at your door. **BI**

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