

How to get your job done in a tight labour market

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In my last column, I predicted a continued boom in the construction sector would mean an increased demand for construction workers.

This means that people wanting a home built or renovated are likely going to have difficulties finding contractors and skilled trade workers and are likely going to have to pay more for their services.

Scrounging for skilled workers and keeping them on the job only makes the stressful experience of building or renovating that much worse.

How can you make life easier? Here are a few tips.

Plan ahead and share your plans with those who can help you get the job done.

Even if you haven't lined up your financing or applied yet for your permits, the moment you are pretty certain you are proceeding with a construction or renovation project, contact the people who can do the job.

If you plan on using a general contractor, interview a number of them well ahead of time. In the interview you should ask the contractor to provide you with a history of past projects, including the various trade contractors that they used.

You are specifically looking for the repeated use of a common group of trades. That gives you some assurance the contractor is able to rely on these trades to show up at your job.

Don't expect a contractor to be able to mobilize his trades people, secure all of the materials and start on the job all within a couple of weeks. Many contractors are booking jobs months ahead.

The more lead time you can give the contractor, the more time they have to work with the schedules of their main trades people to slot your work into their planning. If for some reason you don't proceed with your project, as long as you haven't signed a contract, you haven't committed to anything.

If you are acting as your own contractor, start contacting trades contractors well ahead of time. Ask them to supply references and contact those customers: Interview them not only about qualifications and quality. Ask about reliability.

Did the trade contractor show up as promised? Did they stay on the job until it was completed? Did they complete the job on time?

Develop detailed plans and specifications. It is not enough to sketch your planned project on the back of a napkin. If you are using an architect or interior designer, make sure you work out enough of the details to give everyone a clear picture of the scope of your project. While you are working on these details, you can still alert the trade contractors to your potential project so that they can pencil the job in their schedule.

By supplying the trade contractors with complete drawings and detailed specifications before they actually bid the work, you can be sure you will get a better price and you can also increase your ability to actually secure that contractor.

With detailed drawings and specifications, a trade contractor is able to determine more precisely the amount of materials and labour required to complete their work. If they know they can show up on a Monday morning and be certain they will be pulling their crews off the job Wednesday night, then the trade contractor knows their next job can start on Thursday.

With this kind of certainty, trade contractors will be more willing to take on your job.

Remember, you are buying in a seller's market. The trades will be in short supply over at least the next year. Do your homework to make your project easier on you.

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