

We've been researching remodeling our kitchen for a long time. My husband wants to act as the general contractor to save money. What are the advantages of being your own general contractor?

It's very common for homeowners to want to be their own general contractors. You can save money. You could also find yourself in the middle of some very interesting situations that can delay your project and cost you extra money. My suggestion is to make sure you do your homework.

It starts with defining the responsibilities you and your husband will have for the project. From designing the new kitchen to paying the bills, you should both sit down and define your job descriptions on the project. Write it down. Communication will be very important during the entire process. A torn up kitchen is the center of your home and it can be very disruptive to daily life. Be prepared, understanding and very patient.

If your husband wants to be a general let's define some of the responsibilities of a general contractor.

Defining the necessary subcontractors. The general will look at the project and define and select the necessary subcontractors. The general then defines specifically the subs' responsibilities. It also consists of the amount of time the sub will take to perform the work and when the sub is available. The general will also know if the sub is reputable. Very important.

Coordinating the construction schedule. Once you have all the bids for your subcontractors, you can start planning your construction schedule. It is important to know the construction process in order to schedule the work. Subcontractors usually have several different projects scheduled. So getting them on the dates you need them takes several phone calls. Some will have to be there a few different times during the process.

Ordering materials. If you are responsible for ordering materials, plan ahead. Materials like having cabinets built can take 6 to 8 weeks. You want to have all your materials that need on the job site at the appropriate time.

Begin construction. During the construction process you will need to oversee the work, make sure it is done on time and confirm the work is done correctly. Regularly calling subcontractors and suppliers to coordinate the schedule will be necessary. Be ready for regular trips to pick up materials or unexpected changes.

Change orders. It's very common to have things come up during the construction phase that will require changes. If it's not in the bid with the subcontractor, then it will require a "change order" that will require more time and money. This may require rearranging your construction schedule.

Getting in the middle. Finally the biggest pitfall in being your own general is defining the boundaries of the subcontractors. This becomes the "grey area" of who is responsible. It puts you in the middle of the subcontractors. Be clear about your expectations with your subcontractors.

Okay it's not that bad to be your own general. There are a lot of details that the general oversees during the construction process. These are a few. Be prepared and expect the unexpected. You can get through it and save some money. Then again have a general bid the whole project and compare the price. It might be worth having a general. Hope this helps.