



A Remodeler's Management Guide

Remodeling Production by Walter Stoepffelwerth and Linda Case. Home Tech Publications, 5161 River Road, Bethesda, MD 20816; 1988; 168 pages; \$37.50, paperback.

Despite its homespun, typewritten appearance, *Remodeling Production* by Walter Stoepffelwerth and Linda Case will be an asset to principals of remodeling firms. In fact, I would say it is of value to anyone who is running any kind of building business.

Stoepffelwerth and Case identify production as one of the three essential parts of a remodeling company (the other two are sales and administration). Owners must delegate responsibility as annual volume grows, and in today's firms the traditional field superintendent is being replaced by a production manager. The authors provide a detailed job description for the new position, plus advice on skills required, and guidelines for finding, interviewing, hiring and compensating this key person. Similar information is provided for other members of the production team, including production assistant, construction superintendent, lead carpenter and even truck driver (a.k.a. "go-fer"), whose qualifications might be more than you'd expect.

Once the team is assembled the authors give additional down-to-earth advice on hiring, policy manuals, recruiting, interviewing, conducting "exit" interviews when you lose an employee, the value of on-going training, and the role of pay (not as important as other factors in job satisfaction). They also provide examples of real-life benefit/incentive programs for both office and field employees.

Next comes organization—from crew size (one person is often most efficient), creating in-house specialists, dealing with subs, and using standardized details, to job setup, preliminary walk-throughs, when to have conferences, establishing a chain of command, and giving customers "permission to complain."

After a start-up, attention turns to job scheduling, ordering materials, coping with change orders, punch-lists, and general quality control. Further along the authors describe how to weed out "problem customers" (who hasn't had at least one?), deal with upset owners, handle typical rough spots such as personnel changes or customer-supplied materials, and the importance of job clean-up, all of which contribute to customer satisfaction.

The book closes with a chapter of alphabetical tricks of the trade, from association membership to Xmas bonuses. Sample forms, policy manuals, checklists, and more supplement the text, which is generally sound, level-headed, and based on practical experience.

My only quibble is that the authors' exhortations on the merits

of hiring women, while timely, are rather weak. Otherwise, I'd say that if you want to improve your chances of succeeding as a small builder you ought to read this book.

Remodeler's Helper

Remodelers Business Basics by Linda W. Case. National Association of Home Builders, 15th and M Streets, Washington, DC 22005; 1989; 229 pages; 8 1/2x11 paperback; \$28.80, members, \$36, nonmembers.

Linda Case's *Remodelers Business Basics* is even better than *Remodeling Production* (reviewed above), which she coauthored. It has better organization and visual presentation (i.e. bold-face headings), broader scope, and easier to digest writing. Some of the information in *Basics* is a pruned-down version of the same material in *Production*, but here Case and her co-contributors range over subjects as diverse and useful as business organization, computers, insurance, health and safety issues, finances, advertising, contracts, and design, in addition to production.

The result provides a far wider grasp of all the issues involved in the remodeling trade, at some sacrifice of depth. Occasionally the book suffers from this (albeit necessary) limitation, as in the financial and computer chapters, which are adequate as an overview, but these topics are better covered in more specialized books and articles. The flip side of this is that all the material is crisply written, effectively presented (often with boxed summaries), and appears in bite-sized portions that make for easy reading and comprehension. In a few cases this means one- or two-page chapters, but resources for additional reading almost always are provided.

Some of the more interesting material includes discussion of remodeling as a field for diversification, touching on questions of higher overhead and square foot costs, estimating difficulty, smaller discounts, and increased customer contact. If that sounds like your cup of tea, you'll probably want to know more about communicating your vision to employees, stress control ("the major occupational hazard of remodelers"), encouraging employee and customer referrals, and how to resolve disputes without courting (par-don the pun) ulcers.

Appendices provide a list of relevant organizations/associations, and an extensive bibliography. An excellent companion to *Remodeling Production*.

Guide to Cambridge

Maintaining Your Old House in Cambridge by Charles Sullivan and Eileen Woodford. Cambridge Historical Commission, 57 Inman Street, Cambridge, MA 02139; 1988; 75 pages; 8 1/2x11 paperback; \$9.95.

Maybe you don't live in Cambridge, Mass., but you still might enjoy reading that city's homeowner guide to maintaining pre-1930s houses. Mixed with bits of historical information on characteristic styles, local brickyards

and lumber mills, and typical "Cambridge" wood porch details is a lot of nitty-gritty information on how to save old buildings without trashing them. Included are band-aid and permanent wet basement cures, arguments against vinyl and aluminum siding, the hazards of blown-in insulation, gutter care, paint-stripping techniques, and masonry rehab, plus a host of "classically derived" building details and a lexicon of construction terminology for those who wonder about the difference between the abacus and the echinus of Greek Revival pilaster caps. Well illustrated with drawings keyed to the text.

—Paul Hanke

Free & Cheap

Remodeling for Special Needs: Ideas For Making Your Home Accessible is a reference book from Accent Special Publications, an organization providing material for those with disabilities. This 94-page book is filled with helpful information on barrier-free building and remodeling for both the client and contractor. Where and how to get special devices, design and arrangement of rooms, and dimensions of rooms, cabinets, ramps, entrances, and more, are covered. Also included is a supplemental source list. To order, send \$6.50 to Accent Special Publications, Cheever Publishing Inc., P.O. Box 700, Bloomington, IL 61702; 309/378-2961.

Recipes in the Cupboard: Kitchen Cabinet Facts is a free booklet from Kitchenwood, Inc., which covers basic information about different types of wood used in the construction of kitchen cabinets. It also addresses the options of refinishing old cabinets, building new ones, or refacing, an "in-between" technique. A question and answer section concludes the brochure. To order, contact Kitchenwood Inc., Box 263, Coopersburg, PA 18036; 215/282-4400.

Should You Do It?: Planning For Remodeling is an eight-page publication from the University of Illinois' Small Homes Council/Building Research Council, which lists factors to consider before remodeling. It defines the term remodeling, and covers various pros and cons. A checklist includes personal, financial, structural, design, and "do-it-yourself" considerations. Finally, some common construction terms and a brief source list are given.

Another publication from the council is *Planning for More Space*. This eight-page brochure suggests ways to create more living space in an existing home. Conversion of garage, basement, and attic spaces is discussed, along with the

idea of creating new space with an addition. Both brochures are available for \$1 by writing to: Small Homes Council/Building Research Council, 1 East St. Mary's Road, Champaign, IL 61820; 217/333-0358.

Historic Product Guide: Masonry Products for Historic Buildings is a 99-page, in-depth database of products used in technical preservation, published by the National Park Service. Products are listed alphabetically, and each listing includes the manufacturer's address, product type, composition, product description, subject materials, method of application, precautions and adverse effects, tests/reports, preservation concerns, and project examples. Send \$7 to the Center for Architectural Conservation, College of Architecture, Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta, GA 30332-0155; 404/894-3390.

The Cautious Approach: How To Choose a Remodeler Who's on the Level is a free seven-page booklet from the National Association of Home Builders, which offers issues to consider when starting a remodeling project. Although geared toward the consumer, with topics such as selecting a contractor, financing a remodel, and legal considerations, this booklet is informative for the contractor as well, in providing the client's perspective. To order, contact NAHB, Remodelers Council, 15th and M Streets, N.W., Washington, DC 20005; 202/822-0200.

Out With the Old: Replacing Old Windows is a free 21-page brochure from Wenco Windows. Preparation for projects is discussed, and step-by-step instructions are given with illustrations, as well as what tools and materials will be needed for replacing and repairing old windows. For a copy, write to Wenco Windows, Dept. RW, P.O. Box 1248, Mount Vernon, OH 43050; 614/397-1144. ■