



Drywall for Profit

by Mel Hines



Drywall Contractor: Start and Run a Money-Making Business by Anthony Dougherty (McGraw-Hill, 1994; 212/512-2000). Softcover, 7³/₈ x 9¹/₈, 262 pages. \$18.95.

I sometimes judge the value of a book by comparing the table of contents to the number of pages. So when I first picked up *Drywall Contractor*, I assumed I would find little more than tip-of-the-iceberg treatment of its subject. While that is true in some areas, the amount of information compressed into 262 pages is impressive. In addition to offering very good reading, this book could save budding drywall contractors many times its nominal cost by helping them to avoid what they would otherwise learn from the expensive school of hard knocks.

A questionnaire in the first chapter forces the reader to take a hard look in a very clean mirror. Asking "Do I have what it takes?" and "Am I willing to make the sacrifices?" weeds out the dreamers from the doers.

After helping with the decision to take the plunge or not, the book gets into the nuts and bolts of naming the business, developing a business plan, and setting up an office.

Chapter Three discusses the lifeblood of any business: money. It covers how much is needed to start the business and what amount should be charged for a given project. The treatment of estimating is a little light, however. If you're serious about being a professional drywall contractor, you'll need some additional education that focuses just on estimating.

Chapter Three also contains a Capital Requirements Worksheet that lists start-up and operating expenses, and suggests some external sources of funding. Author Anthony Dougherty points out that of the many reasons for

business failure, one main cause is trying to start up and operate a business without sufficient capital. Dougherty's list is fine under ideal circumstances, but I know of several profitable businesses that were started with much less than conventional wisdom would dictate.

Some of the author's ideas will force operating contractors to refine and rethink their current systems. For example, Chapter Four, "Easy Record Keeping," lists nine commercial record-keeping systems designed specifically for drywall contractors. And Chapter Ten, "Making Your Business Grow," emphasizes the importance of strategic planning: "A business plan defines your business, a marketing plan defines your market, and a strategic plan defines your future." This section alone convinced me the author is someone who has actually run a drywall outfit, not just a journalist who has penned his observations.

In Chapter Five, "Getting Customers," the author reminds us that business will go where it's invited and stay where it's appreciated. The book is a good primer on basic administration of a business enterprise, but again, a serious professional should seek additional education elsewhere.

There are 50 forms and worksheets at the end of the book, suitable for use as both internal and external management documents. A start-up drywall contractor can use most of the forms straight from the book, and all can be customized for specific markets. I particularly like the Request for Quote form, which I am modifying for my use.

You don't need much equipment to start a drywall operation, and the required skills do not take years of formal training to master. Because such barriers to entry are relatively low, the business is very competitive. If you'd like to tip the odds a little bit in your favor, I highly recommend this book. ■

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