

Project Planning to Avoid Frustration

Andrew Pace: Everybody has heard the statement that the first step is always the hardest. Well, with remodeling or home projects that couldn't be more true. Today on Non Toxic Environments we'll talk about project planning and what to look out for, the pitfalls of doing projects around the house. That's, and some customer questions here on Non Toxic Environments.

Hello my friends. This is Andy here for another week of Non Toxic Environments and by myself this week. I'm actually going to be playing something that I recorded a while back, probably back in spring actually. Yes, definitely back in spring, as you'll hear in some of the references, but it's regarding project planning, what to look out for, the challenges, the pitfalls, what you need to consider before taking things on. But I thought it would be a good idea to play it right now for everybody because contrary to typical years we are in the busiest time of the year right now. Typically there's a lull between this time of the year where families are on vacation. There's a lot of things to be to be doing right now in projects around the home, typically take a back seat. But right now it's just been incredibly busy, which is wonderful and we want to make sure that you are taking on these projects with proper expectations of and so you know mentally what to expect from a time-wise but cost, some of the frustrations and so forth. So anyway, just a little bit of information on that and then afterwards we should be left with enough time to answer a question or two from customers. Here's the article I wrote and I'll, I'll read it out for you.

This week's episode of Non Toxic Environments is brought to you by the Green Design Center and Caliwel antimicrobial coating. For those of you who don't know, the Caliwel coating is a

water-based coating that can be used on interior surfaces in your home that are subject to mold, mildew, algae, fungi and bacteria. The Caliwel product eliminates those problems by using a safe and effective natural material, calcium hydroxide, otherwise known as lime to kill off those issues and keep them from coming back for at least six years. Calwell is water-based, free of VOCs, completely hazard free and most importantly very acceptable by those who are the most chemically sensitive. So go to the greendesigncenter.com and don't forget to use the coupon code Nontoxic for your 5% discount.

So this time of year, many people are planning their projects for the coming season with windows open, frost melting and sunshine creeping back into our lives. Motivation is definitely high. While projects big or small might seem easy. The truth is many projects turn into far more than you'd expect. Managing those expectations and planning properly can help mitigate symptoms of project pressure. So here's your challenge. The spare bedroom needs paint. Flooring in the breezeway needs to be updated and you need to replace some dry wall and areas of the home amongst a myriad of other small to-do's. How do you prioritize what should be done first?

So you prioritize your projects. But know that starting one project might open the door to tackle something lower on your list. For example, if you're looking to replace a repair drywall, it makes sense to address the insulation in the wall. Other things might not be by choice.

If you are changing your kitchen cabinets, electrical and plumbing elements might need to be addressed to bring everything up to code, making sure that everything is done correctly in an order while addressing any additional components of the project will make sure your project is successful. Nobody wants to do a job twice. So making sure it's done right the first time to the

best of your or your contractor's ability is important. So here's the scoop: scope of project, figure out what needs to be done overall and then put them in order as far as what has to come first because of necessity. All right. What things should I consider or expect before undertaking all of this? Well, have everything on hand before you start. Nobody likes going to the hardware store three times in an afternoon, although we've all done it. I just did it last weekend.

Oftentimes some products are not available right away or need a fair head start before their use can come to fruition. Make sure you have all of the plumbing pieces for the new faucet you need before you start taking apart the current one. Inspect your tile to make sure none of the pieces broke in shipping and then and get them replaced before you begin your project. Open and inspect all of your products and make sure that you understand their proper usage. If not, ask the questions and I can't stress that enough, folks. Make sure all the products that you've ordered, wherever they come from are intact. They're not broken, they're the correct materials, the correct sizes, the correct colors. Don't just receive a package and let it sit in your living room for six weeks and then open it up to determine that it's the wrong material. You've got to take care of those things right away. So you also need to expect the unexpected opening up walls, removing flooring can uncover problems you didn't know you had. Have some wiggle room in both your budget and your timeline because as we all know, some if not most projects do not go exactly according to plan.

Now, here's the scoop. Prepare, be very prepared. Make sure your bases are covered before you run head first into a project. So who should I call first when planning something that I cannot do myself? Make sure you are talking to the correct professional for your project. First of all, not every interior designer should be making suggestions on moving walls and not every architect should be making recommendations for the best type of flooring for your needs.

Research your people and make sure they feel comfortable doing what you are asking them to do. Having confidence in your professionals can make your project go much more smoothly. If you trust your contractor or your interior designer, leaving some details in their hands can take a load of pressure off of you. Here's the scoop on this- make sure you make the call, contact somebody whose job it is to help with the process such as a contractor, designer, architect, builder, or even your brother-in-law. Make sure you're contacting the right people for the projects and then keep all of those names and numbers on a file folder at the ready so you can make those calls when needed.

All right, so you found the labor to be the most expensive part of the project. Any recommendations for success as a do it yourselfer? Well, before I get into this question, let me just tell you that the average labor rate for a project is approximately two to four times the cost, if not more than the materials involved for the project. And the reason for that as is that they're factoring in obviously not only their time, their expertise, they're getting it done in a certain amount of time and you have to factor in what it would cost if you were to pay yourself for the same project. And I guarantee it's probably going to take you longer because you'll have to learn how to actually use a material.

So first of all, read the instructions thoroughly, not only for the installation but also for the preparations and any final steps. Consider hiring someone as a consultant to answer any questions before you begin. Troubleshooting from the middle of a project is difficult for anyone who has not been directly on the job site, regardless of their experience. Know that bringing in a professional to fix or finish what you may have started already could be more expensive than having them do it in the first place. Research and plan for common issues while installing or dressing certain aspects of your project.

And how about this? Here's the scoop. Preparation is the key for yourself, for the area you're working with, for the materials you're purchasing. Plus ask the right questions before your elbow deep in plaster. Now what should I do if my project suddenly becomes bigger and more expensive than I originally thought? Unfortunately there is no good answer to this and hopefully by having all of the materials on hand before you began brought awareness to some of the finer details that may have been missed. At this point, you can decide to postpone the actual start of the project until the funds or timing workout or do the best you can with what you've got. If you've uncovered a problem you didn't know you had, it's time to start from the beginning and reprioritize what needs to happen. Hopefully you left some of that wiggle room in your budget and your timeline that we spoke about before.

Be patient with yourself. You can only do so much. You know folks it happens. Breathe, think, and then plan what is possible for the absolutely necessary portions of your project. So maybe some things get slated for next year, maybe with the right motivation, time and finances, you'll get everything finished according to your heart's desire. All in all, the recurring themes here seems to be manage your expectations and planning to the teeth. Don't be afraid to ask the tough questions and crush the development stage of all your projects, but remember to be honest with yourself and what is accomplishable and what is not.

This is a common theme to many of our shows. We want to make sure you're prepared. You also want to make sure your manage your expectations.

Well, I hope you enjoyed that. It was actually something I put together. It was an article written for a magazine called Healthwise and I recorded it in an idea I had if they had a digital version

of the magazine, I thought I'd just have an audio recording and they ended up just using the article as our in written form. So I thought I'd use it here and I let you all listen to it and hopefully you got some good information out of that. Obviously the recurring theme is always preparation is the key and manage your expectations. Make sure that what is really achievable can be achieved and understand that in the history of time, there is never been a perfect project and nor is there a perfect product. So you can't let yourself get frustrated when things aren't going perfectly because there is no such thing.

So I think we have time for a customer question and it's actually a nice one for me. Over the years been able to work with, oh gosh you know, I think last count something like 21,000 people in the last 28 years. And several people just ring out as being a wonderful customers, friends, associates from over the years. And I got an email from an old customer of mine, probably haven't talked to him since, I'm thinking maybe 2004, 2005. He emailed out of the blue and asked a question about a project he and his wife are working on. So I'll go ahead and read it. Let's see what the recommendations are.

So due to chemical sensitivities, myself and my wife, we need to reduce levels of VOC in our home to a minimum. Now, in the process of remodeling our kitchen, a number of issues arise. We plan to have to apply one of the AFM sealants on top of the finish on new cabinets that we'll purchase. Which of the AFM sealants is the best choice? Combining high durability with maximum efficiency of sealing the surface of the cabinets, allowing little to no VOC is to escape and enter our living space. They're considering Hard Seal, Safe Seal, Polyureseal BP or something else. He goes on to say, if I provide information on which varnish was used on the top coat by the manufacturer of the cabinets, would that be helpful when considering the compatibility with the AFM product? And also assuming there is no reliable way of predicting

how compatible the AFM sealant was can we purchase small samples of the sealants and run a practical test ourselves? Then he goes on to say, look forward to talking to you it's been since 2005 so it's been awhile. I hope things are well. So here's my response back to this particular customer.

Good afternoon. What a pleasant surprise to hear from you. It's been at least 10 years actually, it's been more like 14 years. To answer your question about sealing cabinets, my recommendation is to buy the cabinets unfinished and use the AFM Acrylacq as the actual finish, three to four coats is typical for cabinetry and furniture. I do not recommend adding extra finishes to already finished cabinetry since the finishes these companies use are virtually impossible to adhere to. I'd fear you create a much bigger problem than your attempts to fix the first issue. We create the AFM samples for the entire country here in our warehouse. And then please give me a call if you wish to discuss, all the best. Folks, this comes up quite a bit. And kitchen cabinetry, I'm actually going to be having somebody on the show in the next couple of months discussing kitchen cabinetry and furniture. But here's the jist of the whole thing, cabinetry and furniture companies that make product in production line, assembly lines, they will not use healthy finishes. They will use formaldehyde free or low formaldehyde plywoods and particle board and so forth. They'll use water-based glues. We know water-based does not mean safe when it comes to wood glue. We talked about the FRAT test I've done on some of the well known wood glues that are offgassing just tremendous amounts of formaldehyde.

But they'll use those things but they'll never switch over to healthy finishes for their production because they need to have a certain amount of solvent in the finish that allows them to dry fast enough that they can actually stack pieces in a quick amount of time. They have to do a lot of production on a daily basis. They can't afford to just let space in the finish area of their shop be

used just for products drying. And unfortunately, when using solvent free finishes and toxin-free finishes like the, the Safecoat Acrylacq and other products like that, it takes a little bit longer to cure to the point where you won't get the product sticking together if they touch. So it's been limited to being used by companies who are doing custom cabinetry and custom finishing, that's what runs the price up. Production lines speed up the process, increase the amount of materials they can do on a daily basis, therefore it decreases the price. Custom cabinetry, custom furniture costs more because they're doing pieces essentially one off. So the issue here then is if you take one of these manufacturers cabinets that uses a traditional even low VOC, quote unquote water-based finish, in order to actually seal them up from off gassing, you have to sand them down to apply the Safecoat products. Besides sanding down all the way to raw wood, you want to see how much sanding is needed before you get good adhesion. It turns into a real logistical nightmare to be honest with you. So we do recommend if you can get that company that you're working with to supply the cabinets unfinished and then hire a local painter, somebody who also will do cabinet finishing to use the Safecoat products to seal it up.

The downside here is cabinet companies sometimes will charge a premium to sell you cabinets that are unfinished. It seems ridiculous, but it's true. If they have their production line in a certain way, it'll cost more to take pieces out of production during the process before the finish goes on and there's more handling involved. There's more coordination involved and so they'll charge you more. Some of these companies they won't charge you more, but they won't give you a discount. Very rarely have I seen a discount from cabinet makers or furniture makers to provide the product unfinished. So, but it's a question you have to ask. This is definitely the best way to have your kitchen cabinets or bathroom cabinets or furniture finished in a healthy way. Making sure you exactly what's going on to it and not have to fight the problem of compatibility with previous coats.

All right. I hope that helps. And it was really great to hear from that particular customer again. It's been so long and I look forward to working with them again. And you know, that's interesting is that being a part of this wonderful business for 28 years, going on 29 years, I've had the absolute honor and pleasure to work with so many fine folks over those years and it's so heartening. It makes me feel so good when I get a call or an email from somebody who I haven't talked to in so long and it's just good to know that we made a good enough impact in their life that they needed to reach out again and ask for some advice and hopefully make sure that this next project of theirs goes smooth. Hopefully they'll listen to this podcast too and they'll listen to that audio article that I read just a few moments ago and they'll get something out of it as well.

All right, folks, that's it for Non Toxic Environments this week. Next week Jay and I will be back with another interesting topic and as always, if you have any suggestions for topics, please feel free to reach out. You can send me a note: andy@degreeofgreen.com. Go to the website degreeofgreen.com and leave us a Speak Pipe on the app. On the website you can actually click on the app on the top left of the website and leave us an audio message. And, every once in awhile we'll take those audio messages and actually bring them right into the show. So we're essentially having our own listeners and clients involved with us on the show here.

We encourage that we also encourage you to go to iTunes and leave us a rating and a review. Your five star rating helps us get noticed by people who are looking for shows like ours. Apple is actually changing the way they are listing podcasts. And, quite honestly, folks, every little bit of help will be a huge help for us. You may think it's not a big deal, but honestly, if everyone who listened to this show gave us a five star review and it's essentially just a one click of a button on

your phone or on your desktop, it would make an enormous difference in getting this in front of thousands and thousands of more people on a weekly basis and we would greatly appreciate that. Otherwise we appreciate you listening either way. And thank you so much for allowing us to come into your home or your car once a week and talk about these very important indoor air quality and human health issues. So we'll be back with you next week. Take care.