

INTRODUCTION

Homeowner's Guide USA

Second Edition

4 Crucial Phases to Effective Contractor Screening

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Introduction

First and foremost, the “*4 Crucial Phases to Effective Contractor Screening*” are 4 steps recommended for US private homeowners to adopt and practice before hiring contractor candidates working in the private residential sector. The 4 phases (steps) entail:

Phase 1 - Mandatory Paperwork for Contractor Screening

Phase 2 - Learning Parameters for Returned Paperwork

Phase 3 - The Necessity of Delay Pending Full Research

Phase 4 – Making the Safest, Wisest Decision

There is a very special guide for each of these phases. Each phase (1-4) is explained in its own special weekly guide. Individually, these phases are integral to a unique, ultra-conservative contractor screening system we know as the “*Home Service Validation System*.” It offers a more stable and precise way for making decisions about contractors.

Non-Standard Practice Among US Residents

Among US residents, incorporation and use of the 4 basic phases is, by inference, not standard practice for most private home decision makers in our country. This is premised on the fact that in most publicly reported cases of contract-related failures, interruptions, or otherwise relative unfulfilled matters of home maintenance and improvement, there was apparently no effective contractor screening protocol that was followed. We can verify this by listening each time to victims of dishonest contractors speaking to the press.

This is also evidenced by the comparable situation being *successfully scandalized*.

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Had there been an effective, intact contractor *screening system in place and enforced*, there would have been little to no likelihood of them experiencing these grave misfortunes. Nevertheless, although some may not want to hear this, residents are normally far too *under-informed, under-strategized, and under-prepared* to soundly identify and screen out malcontents.

A Story

A while back, a resident of *Baton Rouge, Louisiana* hired an appliance repairman without any apparent screening system. She required her dishwasher to be repaired, and she hired an appliance repairman (whom, by the way, is also a contractor if s/he is a business owner) to troubleshoot the situation. Yet over a period of roughly two months, he never got around to fixing her dishwasher. But, in that time, he did manage collecting payments from her by flipping around excuses for not being able to obtain a *special part* for it.

In all, he reportedly collected three separate payments. Yet, after receiving the third, he did not bother to show up again. He flatly abandoned the resident and the project. It turns out that after victimizing this person, a warrant was issued for his arrest. Be it as it may, even *after* the warrant was issued (making him a fugitive from justice), he scandalized four other people before he was finally busted.

Apparently, these four victims also had no initial protocol or screening procedure adequate enough to protect themselves from this contractor's mistreatment. However, had these unfortunate residents incorporated screening protocol, such as what is introduced using the present 4-phase anti-fraud system, they will have known this person was a fugitive from justice. Or, better yet, a residential predator. Furthermore, not only did this man have a warrant for his arrest, he was also a practicing swindler of private home decision makers notably on record with the *Louisiana State Patrol, district attorney, the accompanying parish community consumer affairs department, the local police, and the Better Business Bureau*.

Gen. ref. - Specifics, aside from the official BBB report referred to, were garnered from multiple sources in 2016 which were not easily locatable presently because of a misplaced internal consolidated report during initial reorganization of HGRBS later the same year. For more specific info on these multiple reference points please contact *WAFB, WBRZ, and Baton Rouge Advocate* – all in Louisiana).

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Story Commentary

This contractor was a proverbial, pathological *monster* with regard to private home residents...and this was *long before* he set foot in the home of the Baton Rouge victim mentioned just a short while ago.

Briefly, the dishonorable status of this man was public knowledge! This information was easily accessible to anyone who exercised adequate initiative to invest as much time as reasonable to carefully check him out. By the same token, if by chance they were unable to do it personally, they could have delegated this *deep reputation check* to someone else.

But for them to have started on a contractor-related home project without having an intact system or major safeguard equivalent to what is offered in this 4-phase system, these troublesome events happened. Moreover, it is guaranteed that the next story we read or hear concerning another clever home fraud will be due to this nature of negligence.

The Necessity for Paperwork Protocol

When we opt to study the use and effectiveness of the “4 Crucial Phases to Effective Contractor Screening, [the system],” we stand a far better chance for making the most reasonable decision. We may want to incorporate *the system* as a permanent aspect of our house rules governing hiring of contractors.

It begins with our familiarity with and incorporation of a simple contractor’s application. This is otherwise known as the “Service Validation Form.” The HGRBS nonprofit (sponsor of this special series) makes it easy for us to download this free application specifically for unknown contractors [refer to bottom of this guide to access].

Application in Relation To *The System*

We may want to continually bear in mind that *the system* centers on our diligent use of the suggested contractor’s application. Recommendation is for us to download and print this unique contractor screening document on 8.5 x 11 paper. If we do not have printing access of this caliber, we may want to use our own resourcefulness to obtain it. We are going to need it. We may also want to download and print at least a dozen copies (Link provided at the bottom of this guide) and place them in a drawer by the front door as we would Halloween *candy*.

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Why? Reason is that most undesirable building trades personnel, such as *mysterious* home improvement contractors, have an uncanny knack for popping up there. If we are interested, what a fine thing it can be for us to be able to hand him/her an application to fill out *elsewhere*. After all, we may regard this as, circumstantially, the most responsible action we can take.

Also, it relieves us of a lot of pressure we may otherwise experience trying to figure out how to explain our discomfort not listening to *all the glib*. An added value is that it creates a barrier against feeling compelled to make a decision NOW. Statistically, making these decisions on impulse, rather than documented fact-finding, has often proved detrimental.

Please remember that it may not be advantageous for us to allow contractors to do ANY work on our property without FIRST aptly screening/validating his/her “documented” reputation. This is for our personal and property protection. Proper screening, beginning with collecting contractor data, is suggested to be the number one prerequisite for us to enforce. Without creating this strict safeguard, pending research results, we render ourselves as vulnerable for scandal as anyone who neglects conducting vital preliminary evaluation of contractors’ trustworthiness.

Pre-Screening for Contractor Competence

Fast-forwarding into the near future, let us assume we have downloaded and printed copies of the *Service Validation Form (the application)*. We have a stack of at least a dozen in a draw or other suitable area for storing by the front door. For precautionary reasons, whether we invited a contractor over or this person appeared without notice, if his/her operation does not have a known reputation for great service in the community, we may want to have the application on hand to present.

The application can also serve as a pre-screening tool for making a fair assessment of contractors’ *aptitude for the new challenges* entailed towards successfully delivering on our special project. Interestingly enough, each application we download also includes a separate *instruction sheet*.

It is especially designed to guide contractors on how to fill it out. Invariably, the instruction sheet cancels out any need for us to tutor them about how to do it. If they are focused enough, there should be no problem understanding how it is done.

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No Hand-Holding

However, when contractors persist on having us instruct them on filling out the application, this can be a sign of an unwillingness to figure it out themselves. In spite of the fact that the instructions for accurately completing the application are simple to follow, it is apparent that they would much rather have us do it for them. This is not a known predisposition among *best* professionals in contracting.

It may suffice to also mention that the finest among building trades personnel (such as contractors) are *accustomed* to taking on reasonable challenges – and overcoming them. This is particularly so when they, alone, are responsible for so doing. Subsequently, it is advisable to decline “babying” contractors since the work we have available is for skilled and aptly credentialed adults.

Evidently, if a contractor wants our money, he/she has to demonstrate preparedness to earn it. Yet even this is contingent upon passing the full reputation check/validation the system suggests we launch into after this person returns the application.

Requirement for Filling Out Application, ELSEWHERE!

Part of the system *also* requires the contractor take the application *elsewhere* to fill out. This enables us to:

**breathe* a lot easier.

**avoid* making impulsive or otherwise emotion-based decisions.

**neutralize* any plans a contractor may have had to manipulate us out of doing the necessary research.

Normally, a contractor’s friendly chatter is designed to cajole us into lowering our guard, and to begin thinking that he/she is a *really nice person*. Why bother with the application? Why do the background check? This is how most scams of this nature are given the open door. Advisably, in cases such as these, keep that door shut pending a proper *service validation*. [The reputation check]. Irrespective of how amiable an unknown person or company may appear, we may want to politely insist on the contractor taking the application and filling it out at his/her office, home, etc. We may not want to be so kind as to allow contractors to fill it out where we live.

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The key is to eliminate all chances for socializing since this person may be a residential predator. Most do not sound or look the part. This is how they are able to subvert our defenses. Unfortunately, this awareness was apparently absent among many of those who have been *effortlessly* victimized. Now that this insight is shared with us, do we think it is worth bearing in mind as an essential strategy against being likewise swindled?

We can, instead, arrange a scheduled return on another day. After all, the application should not be so difficult to fill out since the accompanying instructions for the contractors are *numbered*. This means that all the contractor has to do is follow them in order to fill out the application correctly.

When push comes to shove, our special home projects regularly do not come with numbers! This is a hard line to draw, but are we *really* in the market for someone with urgent challenges following something as elementary as “*numerically guided instructions?*” Pre-schoolers can do that with coloring books!

On Guard Against Contractor's Small Talk

Ever meet someone who did a lot of talking to get out of doing something dreadful? For detrimental contractors, filling out the application, knowing it is a screening document, is a fearful thing. It indicates we are going to use their data to discover they are not what they claim to be. Obviously, it is only normal for these types to be as sociable or *abrasive* as possible to escape filling out the application. They will do everything they can to thwart our efforts toward learning they are threats to our household.

These vile efforts can include small talk about our interests in specific things like *politics, religion, and family, the latest news, etc.* If we are not vigilant against being sidetracked having certain beliefs or personal lifestyles in common, this is the time to be. Just because we attended the same school, that has nothing to do with a contractor's current competence to do the job.

We may share the same religious faith, or attend the same congregation, but what bearing does that have on their professional fortitude to deliver on what we have in mind? Absolutely nothing.

*We can benefit remembering this fact: secretly malicious contractors are normally viewed as the least likely to betray us. It is often to our shame since our decision to hire is based more on how we *feel* about them than on clearly *verified documentation*.

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Keeping Small Talk To Bare Minimum

Of course, we can expect contractors to say a few things as anyone wanting work would - even the upstanding ones. That is to be expected. But we may want to avoid full engagement to the point we are sitting down over brunch and a drink. Subsequently, it can be useful for us to remain focused on minimizing the friendly chatter to 1 or 2 minutes, less or more. This is obviously within our own prerogative. Nonetheless, at this stage, the less time we devote to social conversation, the safer we are against aborting the application process.

Brief Story

There is a story of particular interest where a resident invited a contractor over to discuss adding an additional level to her home. As a measure for reasonable support during negotiations, she invited her daughter over. No doubt, they had quite a bit to share about this possibility of having an additional unit – or a second story to the house. It was “free ‘n’ clear,” i.e., mortgage-free. It was paid off. A dream come true.

Now mom and daughter together were wondering about the contractor they were to interview. Meanwhile, he was running late. Nevertheless, he eventually made it, and to their surprise, he brought with him “lobster and imported beer.” According to the report, this was his way of apologizing for being late.

In short, the threesome enjoyed a fabulous first meeting. After a while, on the same day, the resident and her daughter were convinced he was “our guy!” They were successfully charmed.

Yet, to their dismay, they would learn that this man was just another residential predator. He was on record as having scandalized multiple private home heads. Although there were local requirements for him to be aptly skilled, licensed, and insured, he met none of these.

This resident, in her 80's, was handily bilked of \$152,000. It was from a home equity loan on which she now suffered monthly accumulated debt for a home she no longer has. The greatest insult to this injury is that the contractor did such shoddy work that her home was now considered by the municipality as *uninhabitable*. It was condemned. She was driven into homelessness. [Link available at bottom of this guide]

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*We may want to minimize the presence of contractors by saying as little as possible handing them the application. Right now, learning more about contractor candidates can be most paramount through first *legally obtaining enough information*. We can find it most prudent to always be ready to adhere as close to the business of our home as possible. We can do this through maximizing our awareness to the fact that these conversational “sneak tactics” by contractors are primarily designed to derail our efforts to learn more about them.

Summary

This ends our introductory guide to the very basic aspects of the application process in relation to full implementation of *the system*. Next stop: **Phase 1 “Mandatory Paperwork For Contractor Screening.”**

***Phase 1** is the most important step since it entails proactively learning about the *Service Validation Form* a.k.a. *the application*, and its central impact on our level of comprehension of the other three phases of this series.

We can decide to start fresh for its study at another time. Tomorrow is suggested. However, our diving into *Phase 1* remains deftly dependent on a day and time most convenient to each, individually. Whenever that is, it is also recommended that we organize our time in such a way that we will have studied all four phases in this series some time during a single week.

***Bonus!** -Also, a helpful tool we can practice using is a special guide which can enable us to personally discover if whether or not contractors are legally cleared to operate in our county and/or state. It is called the *Service Booklet*. There is one customized to each of the 50 states, including the District of Columbia (abbrev. “DC”). Link also provided at bottom of this homeowner’s guide.

*We believe that each of our contractor-related home projects is a *business function* within the total operation of the home setting. We *know* that the basic function for where we live is for our surroundings to be as comfortable and convenient as possible. This natural, normal business of the home setting is a prime reason for enlisting the assistance of reputable contractors.

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*The first order of affairs in this regard is to determine whether contractors will be a help or a hindrance to our residential values. Our paperwork i.e. *the application*, is our starting point. Yet, here are seven essential tips for getting the most value out of owning the *Service Booklet* (also free and downloadable, without sign-up):

1. *Take ownership.* We are each accountable to our household for decisions we make.

2. *Read often.*

3. *Understand how to use it.*

4. *Use often*, especially with contractors not very known in the neighborhood.

5. *Fully utilize all hyperlinks* it contains to look-up contractors operating in the state where our property is located.

6. *Fully utilize other hyperlinks* to learn about new ideas.

7. *Customize consistent with what we believe will be optimal implementation for our purposes.*

HOME IS THE BEST WONDER OF THE WORLD!

Edited with special assistance from D. Madden [2020]

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HELPFUL REFERENCES

Elderly Woman Bilked of 152,000

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2016/07/17/beverly-senior-left-ruined-alleged-construction-scam/83p2FPv4zqwFWfOK53eReK/story.html>

Service Validation Form

<https://www.americanprivatehomefront-hgrbs.com/service-validation-form.php>

Service Booklet

<https://www.american-homeowners-fast-track.org/service-booklet.php>

American Homeowner's Fast Track to Best Contractors!



This written tutorial is sponsored in association with HGRBS as a private service contribution to the amazing efforts of American private home decision makers towards locating, selecting, and hiring the best contractors for the best results in matters of home maintenance and improvement.

It all begins with making the right decisions. We are better prepared to make the right decisions when we have all the right information about the people we hope to entrust our precious home projects to. This is about doing all the right things to that effect ... and more!

Courtesy HGRBS [a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit ministry of independent volunteers]

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