



Know When to Walk

-- Al E. Bavry, President Emeritus, Kimal Lumber & Hardware

One way or the other, we're all in this Selling Game. I don't think I get a bigger "thump" than when someone tells me about that seventy-five thousand dollar engineered floor/roof pack they just got...Or the hundred and fifty-thousand dollar window pack. Great stuff! But, occasionally things go wrong. Maybe horribly wrong! A great order blows up...You go back and find that by all accounts, you did everything right!! But, bottom line, your customer, the builder, can't pay you, because he's got a problem with his customer—the end user. But wait...We're *not* the contractor. Why should we be in the middle of this? And not being paid to boot.

I won't go any further on that scenario. You know the drill. In many cases, when your contractor runs amuck with his customer, and doesn't get paid...you don't get paid so it's become "your" problem. But digging deeply into the problem, you learn the worst kind of truth: That Builder is tangling with "The Customer from Hell!!" I'll say, that we get into these situations two ways. One way is through the aforementioned builder. Or, at times, you're dealing with that customer directly, who may be an "Owner- Builder." And yes, I've seen these highly intelligent, focused types take on multi-million dollar projects as the Owner-Builder, because (in their minds) they're just that smart and qualified.

So, I'll simply and clearly identify the personality type that we've decided we'll always walk away from. It's a warning sign right from the beginning, when a person may spend months studying specs on windows, doors, trusses (yes, even truss engineering!). And they know exactly...intimately...what the product is supposed to do. And when they buy something, they expect it to be 100% as advertised...Yes! 100%, not 99%. Here's a real example from a couple of years ago. A homeowner who was building close to the water (think hurricane zones) discovered that a month after his high-end windows were installed, that the line from one "Zone" to another...ran right through the *corner* of his house that was set at an unusual angle. Bottom line: Three one-thousand dollar windows were under-specified for the zone. Now this house had passed inspection, everything...not the architect of record, engineer, builder...no one else caught it. But that "sharp," anal owner did! And yes, we ate three windows, and had to pay for the re-installation because technically, it wasn't correct.

The good news is we do a lot of high end work. And in most cases, we experience great results, collect our money, and have a happy customer. But those rare few customers that are out to "eat our lunch" are not that uncommon. Probably half a dozen times a year we "walk" from a bid or potential order, because we've determined, no matter what we do, we will never...I repeat, NEVER...please that end user. Sometimes it's as simple as just telling them "that we're not qualified to meet their demanding specs...And maybe another supplier will!" Also, to just price a job high enough to make sure we don't get the job.

My admonition at the end is simply...When the signs are there, and you sense the impending problems/disaster, don't ever believe that you're just smarter and better than they are. When I've (naively) thought I'd win in the end, I've lost almost every single time. Your best game at the end of "walking away" from a potential new customer is to go find and develop a good customer that *does* appreciate your service, products, and company. Enough said.