



## Zero Punch List: Is it really possible?

By Shawn McCadden CR, CLC

Part One of a Two-Part Article

### The Punch List Happens

Eliminate the Punch List? Is it really possible? Wouldn't it be great if your construction process could totally eliminate the punch list? With some clients it may be impossible. But, imagine a world where there were no unexpected surprises at the end of what you thought was a satisfactory project?

Consider the following statement. "The amount of time it takes to complete the client's punch list is directly related to the amount of time the contractor invests in managing the project and the client." By managing what happens, rather than flying blind, we can predict and control the final outcome. Simply stated, be proactive rather than reactive. It is possible to eliminate the punch list, if you just take it away! However, before you can eliminate it or take it away, you need to understand why it happens. In this article we will discuss the why. Next month I will share some tactics to make it disappear.

### Reasons Why The Punch List Happens

There can be many reasons why the list happens. Some are caused by the contractor, others by the client. I believe the most prevalent reason is that the contractor is afraid to ask the customer what he or she thinks as the project is being built. No one likes to be criticized, so why ask for it? On the other hand, most clients feel badly if they criticize someone or something, so why do it? Another typical reason for the need of a punch list is that as crews jump around from task to task and/or from project to project, things are left incomplete. This can be the result of poor management and a lack of quality control. If the company does not have or use well thought out and written specifications or has not established quality standards, no one on the contractor's team can predict or confirm what level of quality will be acceptable to the client. Other more obvious reasons for the punch list include poor quality work, use of poor quality products and/or the use of inappropriate products or methods for the purpose intended.

### Why Do Clients Use A Punch List?

The most common reason clients use a punch list is because many contractors actually tell them to do it! It's as though it has become a given part of the process, accepted and expected by both parties. No contractor likes having the client looking over their shoulder during the entire project. Clients want things done right, but may not know how to predict the project's final outcome by observing the process as the project is being built. Because of the punch list, clients know they can wait until the end to make judgment and tell you what they think. Because the client controls the money for final payment, they can use the punch list to get the contractor to complete or correct project details. Other reasons a client will use the punch list may include that they are afraid the contractor won't come back after being paid or that they want to delay the final payment. Delaying that final payment may be for cash flow reasons or because it's a way to get even with the contractor for something that the client believes did or didn't happen. The last two reasons mentioned above are typically the cause for the "Never Ending Punch List".



## Problems Trying To Complete The Punch List

In addition to understanding why the punch list happens, it is important to consider the difficulties of completing the list before laying out tactics to prevent or manage the whole scenario. I have found the biggest obstacle to be the customer's perception versus the contractor's. This difference in perception can impact the "fix it" versus "replace it" argument, particularly if the difference in perception is the result of poorly written specifications or worse, no specifications at all. Trying to get back to complete the list, when you are already behind schedule elsewhere, can also get in the way. One harsh reality is that it costs more to fix it than to have done it right the first time. There may not be any money left in your budget to pay for the efforts required to complete the list. In addition, no one likes doing the work. Fixing your own or someone else's work, and having the right tools or materials on site, make the thought of the punch list assignment as desirable as cleaning the outhouse on a hot August afternoon!

Sorry, no tactics in this month's article. You will have to wait until next month. In the meantime, while you are waiting for the next issue, consider what was discussed here, in addition to your own experiences with why the punch list happens. By knowing why things happen, what they do to your bottom line and how they make you and your clients feel, it becomes easier and more likely that you will find and implement mutually beneficial solutions. And remember; don't get mad at someone for doing something you didn't say they couldn't do! Manage expectations!

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**Shawn McCadden** is one of the most prominent figures in the remodeling industry. He obtained his builder's license by age 18; founded, operated, and sold a successful employee-managed design/build firm; co-founded the Residential Design/Build Institute; and went on to become director of education for a major national bath and kitchen remodeling company. Today he speaks frequently at industry conferences and trade shows, consults with remodeling companies, and writes a monthly column for Remodeling magazine.

To find out about the services he offers to serious remodelers, e-mail Shawn at [shawnm@charter.net](mailto:shawnm@charter.net) or call him at 978-272-1182.



102 Paquawket Path • Groton, MA 01450 • [shawnm@charter.net](mailto:shawnm@charter.net)  
T: (978) 272-1182 • C: (978) 726-6531 • F: (978) 236-7206

