



Making Changes is Part of the Process

When we're on the job site, we want to make the most progress possible on our clients' home. Building is a dynamic and exciting process, one that we try to make smooth and easy to understand for our clients. Once we get going, things can happen quickly, so we help our clients make decisions well ahead of time to help ensure they get the home of their dreams.

Building Success 101

Q: How difficult is it to move a wall to enlarge a room?

A: That depends. If the wall is non-structural (meaning it is not vital to the home's stability), moving it slightly can be accomplished. If moving the wall affects the size or location of a door or window opening or other feature in that room or an adjacent space, the alteration is more difficult, time-consuming, and costly. The movement of structural walls, especially once the house has been completely framed, is often prohibitive in cost.

Before the first scoop of dirt is moved, we collaborate with our home owners to make most of the big decisions, but that is rarely the end of the process. Once we're underway, owners often think of a few things they'd like to change. Such changes may range from making the house larger to a change in bathroom cabinets, a different floor pattern or material in the kitchen, or just adding an extra light switch or two.

We document such requests, called "change orders," to make sure that we and our clients have a clear understanding of the scope and cost of the change. Although our goal is to make sure our clients are satisfied with their home it's also important for the homeowner to understand how change orders affect the building process. When owner and builder communicate well, the impact of change orders on the construction schedule and budget can be minimized.

A change order made after construction begins always has a cost attached. The cost may be the time (and labor) it takes to make the change or it may be the price of additional materials or products required. Usually the cost includes both of these.

The timing of a change order has a big impact on such costs. Typically, the later in the building process, the more expensive the change order. Some changes, of course, are simply impossible or truly cost prohibitive, such as altering the foundation or adding a basement once we've started building a home's structural frame.

We respect our clients' desires to get exactly the house they want. We know that some finishes (or even floor plans) may be hard to visualize until they're actually installed or built. Changes will happen! For that reason, we've become more sophisticated and systematic about managing change orders. Our process not only ensures good communication and provides assurances between everyone involved, but also helps us maintain the building schedule and minimize additional costs.

The change order process: The most effective change order processes follow a general pattern that creates a paper trail and provides reliable cost information up front, including:

- **Centralization.** Your change order requests are managed by our staff to help ensure effective communication between everyone involved. This includes specialty trade contractors, suppliers, our job site managers, and, of course, our client. We do not allow change order requests to go directly from our clients to our trade contractors as this is a quick route to misunderstandings and disrupted schedules.
- **Documentation.** Customer requests are transferred to an electronic or paper-based change order form that initiates a paper trail and helps ensure greater accuracy and communication.
- **Terms.** We try to complete the cost estimate for change orders promptly so that owners can make an informed decision in plenty of time to make the change or decide against it.
- **Confirmation.** It's important to everyone involved that no change occurs without a client signature. Clients must approve the cost and terms, as well as the style, finish, or other details about the change. In addition, clients must be aware of how the change may affect their move-in date or other aspects of the construction schedule.
- **Payment.** Costs for change orders may be billed separately, usually as soon as the change has been made and completed to a client's satisfaction. Sometimes we ask for a percentage of the cost or full payment up front before making the alteration.

By using a dedicated, document-based change order system, our clients are assured that any changes they consider -- whether minor or extreme -- are taken care of in a timely fashion without confusion, miscommunication or unnecessary costs.

Warm regards,

Richard

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