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Re-Do-It Yourself

I used to build a lot of second homes for lawyers, stock traders, accountants, and a couple of TV and movie execs. And based on the frequent calls I received during the week from their New York, Boston, and L.A. offices, it was clear that their minds were never far from their projects. They'd show up whenever they could for a site visit. Some of them even wanted me to set them up with work for their weekend visits, like insulating kneewalls, hanging drywall, or pulling nails out of scrap lumber.

So I'd tell these customers that we'd charge them \$25 an hour if they wanted to watch, \$50 an hour to help, and \$100 an hour for us to re-do work they did over the weekend. Oh yeah, there was a fourth surcharge: 100% markup on any materials or products they dragged to the site for us to install, with a full disclaimer on warranties for these items.

I loved how much passion our customers had for their new homes and remodeling projects. It enriched the process and deepened our commitment to quality almost every time.

And then...there were those impassioned owners who stayed up a little too late at night watching DIY TV shows, ready to pass on their late-night expertise the next day, in painful detail, when they could have been billing out \$400-plus an hour as a lawyer or something.

That's when I came up with a fifth billing rate: \$200 an hour for my telephone time spent saying, "Wow, they actually picked through their materials to find straight lumber? What a great

suggestion!" or "Yes, we'll be sure to use a level when we install your cabinets. I hadn't thought of that."

Whenever one of them would say, "Did you see 'This Old House' last night?" I could only answer, "No, I was busy planning work on *your* new house." I have yet to watch more than 10 minutes of home repair, restoration, or construction on TV.

I have nothing against these shows, I just never got into watching somebody work construction on TV after spending all day doing the same work and managing projects. But I actually think these programs have increased appreciation among civilians for the work we do as pros.

I've also got nothing against the DIY craze. I'm just glad my customers never asked to use my tools on the weekends. Given the numbers of DIYers injuring themselves with newfound pneumatics or unfamiliar power tools, I think the big box stores should be giving first aid training along with their do-it-yourself classes, certainly to anyone buying air or power tools.

While we're at it, I have another request for the big box boys: How about helping your customers make it home safely with their materials, without causing an accident along the way? I've seen too many DIYer-owned sedans, rattling down the highway, with four sheets of plywood held onto the roof by kite string and hands coming out of the driver and passenger windows.

Maybe I should follow them home next time to see if they need a contractor to finish things up for them.