Guide to Hiring a Painting Contractor
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Painting a house is one of the more significant projects and expenses that homeowners face. It can require as little work as pruning back a few shrubs to be able to paint the exterior or as much as moving furniture, clothing, artwork, and the entire family for several days. Here are some tips on picking the professionals for your painting project.

You can optimize your chances of hiring an experienced, reliable contractor if you are equally business-like about handling the process. That takes some time, but you may live with the results of the contractor’s work for many years. Spending a couple of days scouting and checking out candidates might be your best insurance.
Four keys to successful painting jobs

1. **References and background checks:** Get referrals from friends, neighbors, or co-workers, or ask for names from a couple of reputable home building contractors. Make a list of three or four names. Before you call the candidates, contact your Registrar of Contractors, the Better Business Bureau, and look up reviews online to make sure they are currently licensed and well rated. Call the contractors and ask to visit very recent jobs in person. Seek out customer feedback about communication and workmanship. Ask and take note of how quickly initial calls are returned, how well you communicate, promptness for appointments, and whether the contractor calls if he or she is running late. Narrow down your choices to two or three bidders.

2. **Contractor’s work practices:** When each contractor makes the initial visit, show him/her the scope of the work. Make a list of topics such as the following to inquire about and to later write into the contract:
   - Existing condition problems such as mold, mildew and drywall damage. Ask which of these he/she does or doesn’t normally include in the job.
   - Find out whether they normally roll or spray the paint. Rolling applies more paint, but even then, you may want two coats.
   - Specify preferences for certain brands and product lines, with no substitutes unless your research shows they are of equal quality.

3. **Define schedule and no-show policy:** Ask about the schedule of payments and clarify that you want to include a several hundred dollar hold-back for ten days after completion. Write down a starting date and ending date and penalty per day for missing the deadlines for situations other than weather or family problems. It’s realistic to add two weeks for unavoidable delays at the outset. State that the contractor must firmly commit to calling if they will be more than 15 minutes late. Say that you want it agreed that even one no-show day without a prompt phone call of explanation is grounds for a penalty.

   It’s necessary to have these agreements in writing because your time is important and you are in charge. You don’t want to be hanging around wondering where the crew is. Also ask about the sequence of rooms to be painted so you can plan for food prep and sleeping or lodging accommodations.

4. **Bids and contracts:** Note how smoothly and quickly the process goes for receiving the bids. It’s the first indicator of the contractor’s efficiency. Compare bids to make sure that the specifications in all of them are alike and get recalculations for any items that were overlooked. Choose the contractor who gives you the most confidence in the workmanship and working relationship, and don’t be afraid to say “Contractor A was $400 less. I’d prefer to work with you if you can come closer to the lower price.”

   When you receive the final bid, make sure it includes all the items on the list you went over when the contractor first visited your house. That should include the specific paint brands and product line within the brand. The contract should require two coats plus primer. You may have to pay about 10 percent of the job at contract signing, an interim payment on large jobs, and the balance less the final holdout at job completion. The holdout is paid after you’ve settled back in, inspected all work closely, and had any touch-ups done to your satisfaction.