

Don't trust a salesperson!

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Try before you buy

My wife works in an awesome wine and cheese shop called the Marion Street Cheese Market (shamelessly gratuitous plug). At Marion Street, they really do it right for me as a consumer. Before I give them my money, I can taste the cheeses, sip the wine or beer, get a sample slice of salami. I have no disappointing surprises because I can do my research before buying. I don't need to blindly trust the salesperson because I know what I am getting before I buy.

Property managers don't normally trust a salesperson blindly either. Trust? Sure. Unequivocal, blind trust? Not normally, and certainly not to the point of awarding contracts without some degree of due diligence. Managers go through the fair RFP processes, soliciting quotes and bids from salespeople they know, like, and trust. You would not be serving ownership to trust a salesperson to the exclusion of competing vendors. You may be dismissive of the less well-liked vendors' bids, but as decision-maker you still have that collection of bids in a folder so as to explain your choice of contractor — be it in roofing, paving, snow removal, or landscaping.

Armed with formal offers hand-delivered by your chosen salespeople, need you really care how many roofers are employed by the roofing contractor? Or how many graders the paver operates? Whether the snow removal company owns its own plows? Not really. Before work even begins, you have commitment that your contractor will deliver services A, B, and C on dates X, Y, and Z in return for a given price — the essence of a contract. How those services are delivered to you is largely left to the contractor, so long as you as the consumer are happy with the outcome.

Uh oh...

Now what of the charming salesperson promoting emergency services to respond to fire and water damage? Your RFP process weeds out the inadequate bids of the nonetheless well-liked salesperson — unless urgency prohibits the checks and balances of the multiple bid RFP process! Now you're outright hiring a contractor without

the due diligence that you yourself pride yourself upon. And if that amiable, well-intentioned salesperson's services are not up to the task...who is taking the heat for the hiring decision?

So don't trust the salesperson...

When a sprinkler head breaks, you are not calling in a salesperson. When the plumbing fails, you are not calling for a salesperson. When the fire is put out but there is smoke everywhere, you are absolutely not calling for a salesperson's help. What you need at that moment is response. Response from a restoration company with verified horsepower, verified training, verified equipment, verified job documentation practices, verified experience in responding to the scale and complexity of your issue. From another perspective, consider your own conviction today in answering this from your buildings' owners: "We are pleased you know who you would call in a property emergency. How exactly do you know his firm is up to the task?"

...trust the company

Visit the company. Shake hands and look into the eyes of those individuals who will come to your rescue. (Rarely are these the salespeople, and certainly not this author.) Leaf through examples of their job documentation for you and your insurance company. See their equipment inventory with your own eyes. Size matters in emergency services — you might be one of 30 jobs, large and small, on the go at that time; but the larger the restoration company, the more you'll feel like their one and only client. Can't visit all these contractors? Offer to visit one in your neighborhood and share your impressions across your company, and solicit peers to visit those close to them. You'll be doing your colleagues a great favor by helping them avoid making a bad day even worse. And how else can you know, before it's too late, what you're getting into in calling any given restoration company?

Michael Collins has worked for Rolling Meadows-based JC Restoration for 7 years. He encourages all to assess his company's facility and ability to respond to your emergency. He may be reached at 800/956-8844 or 630/546-8599.