

The Illusion of Control

Patrick D. Coveny, Custom Builders Council President



Over the years many of us in the building business wonder why our customers will pay a much larger bill or invoice and fight over seemingly tiny costs or not include them when adding to their homes. How can it be that those with the money refuse to pay for something that is a minor cost to them?

A recent article in the Wall Street Journal attempted to shed some light on this dilemma. They cited a person who just bought a rather expensive sailboat and proceeded to have a name painted on the rear of it. The name the owner used was two letters long because, the painter charged one dollar per letter. The question would become why would

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someone who could easily afford to pay for a full name do this. We in the building industry see this quite often.

Experts like to tell us that how the little things add up, so a penny saved is a penny earned. And that small things matter and will eventually turn into real money. But the author of this article is convinced it goes deeper than this. It just might be a lesson in psychology and self-esteem.

He said as we get older we face

many fuzzy, complex choices when it comes to life's biggest expenses. Are we spending wisely? Are we saving enough for retirement? Do we own too many stocks? Are we charting the best course?

We cope with these choices because we have control over the small stuff. He said small expenses are our emotional counterbalances. We can adjust them up or down to feel as though we have stabilized things. He cites examples of when we fill our gas tanks that sometimes

we pay attention to prices and other times we do not. If we feel out of financial control we drive for miles in search of a gas station to save three cents per gallon. He said that this is about people feeling the need to be responsible and shrewd.

Think of all the times we are out of town and, in some instances, we pay whatever it costs (i.e. hotel bills, fancy restaurants, etc.). Imagine what homeowners go through with large change orders and extras they have no idea what

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they actually cost but they are fully willing to pay. Then the day comes and they won't spend five dollars to upgrade something you think is a no brainer.

When large cost items go badly, customers have someone to blame—you the builder. When the small cost items don't work out they feel it is only their fault and can only blame themselves. We should all keep this in mind when our customers balk at seemingly small upgrades. What seems like pointless eccentricity really is a peek into our private hopes and fears. 

**Do you have a unique product or service you would like to present to the Custom Builders Council?
If so, please contact Kathy Calandriello at (630) 627-7575 or via e-mail: kathyc@hbagc.com to
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