

# The Professional Handyman

Turning Skills into a Thriving Business



Bill Mauger

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# Introduction

Welcome to a journey through the experiences and insights of home improvement and handyman service companies. This book not only teaches you how to maneuver jobsite activity but also inspires a mindset of excellence and responsibility. Seize the opportunity to enhance your skills and achieve outstanding project results.

In these pages, you will meet John, a skilled handyman whose invaluable insights offer essential lessons in craftsmanship, client interactions, team management, and business strategies. Whether you're an aspiring handyman, a seasoned professional, or simply someone eager to understand the principles of effective tradesmanship, John's compelling journey presents relatable scenarios and practical wisdom that resonate far beyond the workplace. Dive in and transform your approach to the trade with his expertise.

At its core, this book firmly believes that real success in the trades stems not just from skilled hands, but also from intentional strategies, effective communication, and unwavering integrity. Our mission is clear: to empower you with actionable strategies and time-tested principles that will help you create a sustainable, profitable, and fulfilling handyman business.

Thank you for choosing to invest your time here. Let's build something meaningful together.

Bill Mauger

Your Local Handyman Inc®

# Acknowledgments

To the thousands of people who have been part of this journey - family, tradespeople, apprentices, subcontractors, commercial & strata clients, homeowners, suppliers, realtors, property managers, advisors, and supporters - thank you.

Your efforts, your questions, your expectations, and your trust have not just created jobs; they have transformed our business into one that truly values craftsmanship, communication, and character. Together, we are building a legacy that prioritizes excellence and integrity.

Regardless of whether our time together was a day, a season, or years, you made an undeniable impact. Your contributions, no matter the size, ignited my passion to create something extraordinary and inspired me to empower others to do the same.

This book, this training, this mission – they all owe their existence to your invaluable support.

With deep gratitude,

Bill Mauger

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01

# Chapter 1 – Different Perspectives



## Featuring John the Handyman

John stood near the edge of the backyard, captivated by the framing of the new deck taking shape. The air was filled with the invigorating scent of fresh lumber, and the crew moved with a perfect rhythm - neither rushed nor dragging, but striking just the right balance. This was the moment to envision the countless memories that would soon unfold in this inviting space.

“James,” he called out to one of his carpenters, “how’s the stair stringer layout?”

“Running the numbers now,” James replied, pencil behind his ear. “Should have it marked out in five.”

“Good. Let’s get ahead of it while the sun’s still cooperating.”

John scanned the site with a practiced eye. Everyone was moving with purpose. This kept things profitable.

Near the truck, Philip the apprentice had finished offloading the last stack of deck boards. Without prompting, he began clearing the scrap pile. It wasn’t glamorous, but it made everything easier.

Every delay had a cost. Every hour had a purpose.

## The Ask

Susan, the homeowner, walked around the side of the house. Her phone was in her hand, sunglasses pushed up into her hair.

“John - I’ve been thinking. I’d like a privacy screen along the east side. Just something simple.”

John nodded once. “We can work it in. I’ll adjust the numbers and let you know what that adds. Will that be okay?”

“Yep,” she said. “I just want to know what I’m getting into.”

“I’ll send it over tonight.”

Susan smiled. “Thanks, John. You always make things easy.”

## Quiet Adjustments

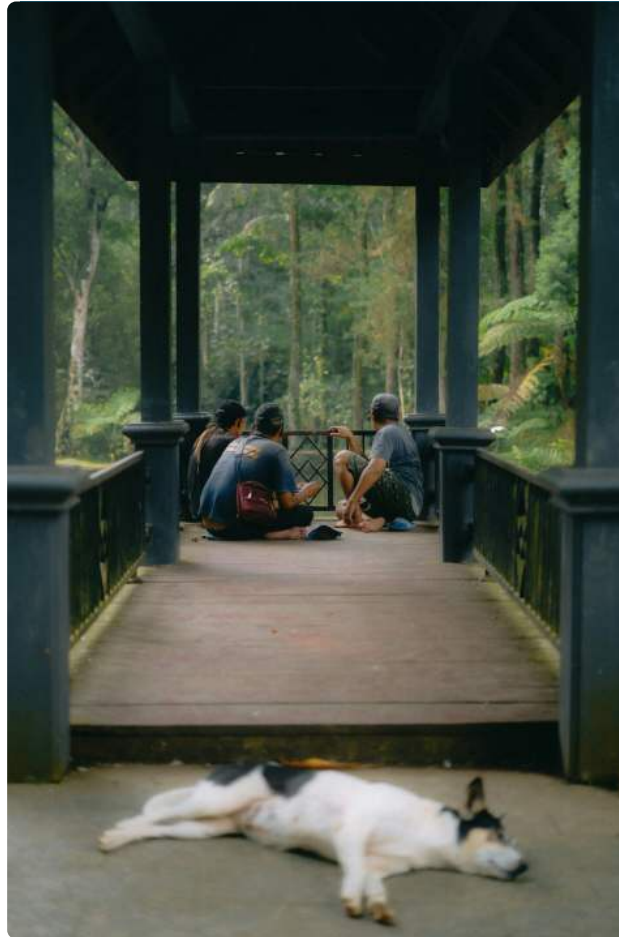
John eyeballed the area of the proposed screen, mentally running through materials and time. There was no need to halt production. If she was serious—and she usually was—the guys could stay on schedule with minimal shuffle.

He called James over.

“Privacy screen is likely. Don’t change the layout, but start thinking through your post spacing.

James nodded. “Will do.”

John turned to Philip. “Once you’re done there, see what’s needed to keep things moving. I’ll have an update for you fellas later.”



# Where This All Leads

John walked back to his truck and leaned against the tailgate for a moment. Fifteen years ago, he would've just tacked the screen on and hoped it all worked out. But not anymore. Now, he ran it like a business.

For years, John poured countless amounts of time and over \$250,000 into developing a Handyman Franchise model - training materials, operations manuals, employee handbooks, timesheet binders, franchise consultants, the registered trademark, proving his numbers, the best branding, lawn signs, cards & brochures, exceptional software, business training, the 75-page franchise document, pricing out vans, tools, and shop space. He was even in the Vancouver, BC franchise show... twice! Twenty-four people had wanted in for \$50,000 a pop. He turned them all away.

It never sat right.

The stark reality that John couldn't get over, despite having years of experience under his belt, was that deep inside, he knew carpenters did not want more rules to follow. This was compounded by the fact that after the dust settled, they would have been saddled with nearly \$100,000 in debt before invoicing their first customer.

John had an ethical ethos, and this would have shattered it. He had a desire to create something truly impactful that empowers individuals, enabling them to learn essential skills and knowledge needed to actively shape their own futures.

He chose a new approach that empowers skilled tradespeople to confidently estimate, manage teams, and transform vehicles and tools into a successful business for less than 20% of the franchise fee. True story!

# Contractor's Corner

## **Scope of Work Changes:**

If a client wants more, give them the price in writing before altering your Scope of Work.

*[These topics are covered in greater detail in GET THREE QUOTES, another book I published.]*

## **Leadership Insight:**

When the crew's moving, don't get in the way. Just feed the momentum.

## **Estimation Tip:**

Always build in a little buffer, for time, material, and the unexpected.

## **John's Note:**

You don't need a franchise to build something real. You need a system you can understand, an estimate you can stand behind, a crew that trusts you'll keep them busy, and an experienced mentor & sounding board who cares about your success and will help develop YOUR brand. Everything else is noise.

02

# Chapter 2 - Site Pressure



## Featuring John the Handyman & Matt the Inspector

The crew was rolling. The framing was squared, posts were set, and John's timeline still had breathing room. That's when the white city truck rolled up.

Matt stepped out slowly, clipboard in hand. His was worn at the edges, held together by tuck tape and reputation.

"Morning, John," he said.

"Morning, Matt. Coffee's still hot if you're brave."

Matt smirked. "Nah. Last time I drank your site brew I didn't sleep right for three days."



John chuckled and waved him toward the building. "We're ready for the framing check."

Matt paced the perimeter with practiced eyes. He didn't say much, which was either very good or a little bad. He tapped his tape measure against a post before finally speaking. "This joist is a bit out."

"I think your carpenter installed it on the wrong side of his line. It's exactly 1-1/2" out. It'll happen."

John stepped closer, expression even. "Good eye. Looks like that is exactly what happened. We'll have it moved in 5."

Matt nodded. "Appreciate that. Also, your setback has plenty of room, but the markings are almost gone. Did it rain? Again, no biggie, just make sure that mark's visible for the final."

"Yeah, I see that," John said. "Sun must've faded it. I'll hit it again."

## Behind the Scenes

Philip was working up near the ledger when Matt passed underneath.

“Are you the apprentice?” Matt asked, pausing.

“Yes, sir.”

“You running this build?”

Philip looked confused. “No, I-”



“I’m kidding,” Matt said with a slight grin. “Keep those joists clean and straight and make sure your boss doesn’t miss anything.”

“Yes, sir.”

Matt continued his circuit, muttering numbers under his breath and scribbling something on the form.

John met him back at his truck.

"You've still got the cleanest site on this block," Matt said. "It's noticed."

"Appreciate that," John replied.

"You mentioned you're adding a privacy screen?"

"Client's thinking on it," John said. "I'm pricing it for her."

Matt nodded, flipped his sheet over, and handed John the slip.

"Passed. Call it in when the railings are up."

"Will do."

## **What That Meant**

As Matt pulled away, John walked the deck one more time - not to double-check Matt's notes, but to get ahead of the next ten things that could slow them down.

He didn't run his business by guessing.

A project like this might not need blueprints, but it needs control. Every inch mattered. Every crew member mattered. And when an inspector walked a site and left with zero issues, it wasn't luck - it was discipline.

# Contractor's Corner

## **Permit Tip:**

Build as if the inspector will show up unannounced. Because one day, he will.

## **Professionalism Principle:**

Inspectors don't remember the perfect projects - they remember who made their job easier.

## **Leadership Insight:**

You don't have to do everything yourself. But everything reflects on you.

## **John's Note:**

Inspectors don't pass jobs because you're nice. They pass jobs because they're ready. Clean site. Good communication. No surprises.

**03**

# **Chapter 3 – Estimating It Right**



## Featuring John the Handyman & Peter the New Lead

John wasn't a fan of stepping away from a jobsite during working hours, but on Tuesday, it couldn't be helped.

Susan's deck was nearing the finish line. James and Andrew were laying the final deck boards while Philip handled cleanup and tool cleanup. The crew was moving - steady, productive - and John trusted them to hold momentum.

He'd just returned from a quick stop at the hardware store when he'd crossed paths with a man named Peter.

Peter had spotted John in the lumber aisle. He noticed the clean branding on his shirt. Straightforward logo. Local number. No gimmicks.

"You do decks?" Peter had asked.

"Among other things."

Peter introduced himself and mentioned a project he was thinking about - a small covered outdoor workspace off the side of his garage. "Just need a roof and maybe some power," he'd said. "I've had it in my head for a while, but now I'm finally ready to get an estimate."

They agreed to meet that afternoon - just a quick walk-through to get a sense of scope and layout. John could visualize most projects on-site in under 10 minutes, but he always takes a tape measure and a camera (phone) as backup when preparing an estimate.



## Estimate in Motion

By 3:30 pm, John was in Peter's backyard.

The space was tight, angled slightly downhill, and ran into some obstacles that might interfere with the post placement. A simple roof? Maybe on paper. In reality, it would need a strong ledger and a well-planned footer placement.

John asked a few key questions. "You want outlets? Planning to hang anything from the beams? What kind of finish on the underside - exposed rafters or closed soffit?"

Peter seemed impressed by the thoroughness. "I hadn't even thought about that," he said.

John nodded, took his measurements, and said he'd get the estimate out later that evening, after the crew wrapped for the day.

The next morning, Peter called.

"I was looking at the numbers," he said. "It's more than I expected for a simple roof."

## The Estimate Conversation

John had expected that.

"I don't estimate projects based on how simple they look," he said. "I estimate them based on what it takes to build them properly."

He paused, then added, "This isn't just a roof. It's prep, framing, anchoring, power, water control, cleanup - and everything in between. That number includes all of it. No guesswork."

Peter was quiet for a second. "Yeah... okay. I just had no idea it added up so fast."

John didn't argue. He just said, "It always adds up fast when you do it right."

## John's Method

John had worked with a dozen estimating software systems over the years. They all had bells and dashboards - and they all took more time than they saved.

Now, he taught something different.



- Visualize the job
- Measure precisely
- Estimate manually using a spreadsheet you trust
- Know your margins, your hours, your materials
- Stand behind your estimate because you understand it inside and out

That was real confidence, not software-driven. Earned.

# Contractor's Corner

## **Estimating Rule:**

Estimate what it takes to build it right - not what the client thinks it should cost.

## **Efficiency Insight:**

Software should support your system, not replace your thinking.

## **Branding Reminder:**

Good branding doesn't ask for attention. It earns it.

## **John's Note:**

When you know your numbers, you don't need to justify them. You need to explain what they represent. That's how you win trust and keep margin.

**04**

# **Chapter 4 – The Shortcut**





## Featuring John, Bart, Philip & Thad

Midweek, the job was in that familiar phase - too far along to change direction, not far enough to coast. The crew was framing the last section of stairs, and John was checking the fascia alignment when he spotted it.

Bart had cut the stair stringers. It was tight, functional, but the rise was off by nearly half an inch.

John crouched beside it. No lecture, no sigh, just a finger pressed to the joint.

“Bart.”

Bart looked over. "Yeah?"

John tapped the stringer. "What's this rise?"

Bart hesitated, then pulled the tape. He measured. He swore under his breath.

"I'll fix it."

"I know," John said, already walking away.

He didn't need to say more. The crew knew the standard. No shortcuts - not even on a set of stairs.

## Philip's Quiet Win

A few minutes later, John turned and saw Philip sweeping the cut station without being asked. He'd also reloaded the air nailer and sorted the 2x stock by length. The crew was moving quickly because of it.

John didn't say anything at first. But as he walked past, he muttered, "That's good work, Philip."

Philip smiled to himself and kept working.

## An Unexpected Visitor

Later that afternoon, a truck pulled up and parked at the curb. Thad stepped out. He was a handyman John had met at a small builder's event a few months back. He was a solid guy and talented, but still finding his footing in the business.

"I was working nearby," Thad said. "Saw your logo on the trailer. Mind if I hang out for a few minutes?"

Sure, John gestured. "Just don't distract the crew."

Thad stood off to the side, watching how the crew moved. Philip was hauling boards. Bart was repositioning the stair stringers without complaint. Everything was running quietly and cleanly.

"You always keep it running this smoothly?" Thad asked.

John gave a half-smile. "Whenever possible, yes."

"I've got work," Thad continued, "but I feel like I'm always behind. I'm either quoting too low or chasing stuff around. I can't quite seem to find a rhythm."

John nodded. "Been there, but I call my pricing 'estimating' because it's a much more forgiving word when something unexpected pops up."

"I tried a few software packages. Just got overwhelmed. Still don't trust my numbers."

"The software is good for a few things, but you need to look beyond the software." John said. "It's about seeing the build or any project in your head. Knowing the steps. Measuring everything. Writing your numbers. Then check your math."

Thad looked at the crew again. "You teach this stuff?"

John nodded slowly. "Not full time. But when someone's serious, yeah. I'd rather see ten guys build **their brand** right than one guy stuck paying fees to use someone else's brand."

Thad nodded. "I think I need to talk to you again. Soon."

John just said, "Bring a pen."



# Contractor's Corner

## **Quality Rule:**

Shortcuts might save minutes now - but they cost hours later.

## **Apprentice Insight:**

Stay useful. Anticipate the work. Make yourself part of the flow.

## **Business Reminder:**

You don't need to build someone else's franchise model. You need a system, a name, a good trainer who can also be your mentor, and a reason for people to trust you.

## **John's Note:**

There is always an easier path, but the one that enhances your reputation (**the right way**) takes longer. I focus on teaching only that one.

05

# Chapter 5 - The Wrap-Up





## Featuring John, Philip, Thad & Susan

The diner was quiet at 7:00 am. The regulars were halfway through their breakfasts, heads down in newspapers or emails. John walked in with his clipboard tucked under one arm - habit, not a necessity. He spotted Philip already at a corner booth, coffee in hand, looking like he hadn't fully woken up.

"You get any sleep?" John asked as he slid into the seat across from him.

"Some," Philip mumbled.

"You looked a bit bagged yesterday."

Philip gave a tired nod. "I'm trying to keep up. I feel like I'm always running behind."

"You are," John said flatly, then softened. "That's normal. You don't learn this trade by knowing. You learn it by doing - tired, sore, and behind until you catch up."

Philip sipped his coffee, half-smiling.

"You've been stepping up, though," John added. "Next month, you're due for a pay raise. It's a small raise, but you've earned it."

Philip looked up, surprised. "Really?"

John nodded. "Also... spread the word with your friends. I'm going to need a second helper soon - a good one like you, with strong hands and a work ethic. I don't have time to babysit."



"I might," Philip said. "I'll ask around."

Their breakfasts arrived. This diner is efficient! Just like the man footing the bill.

# The Estimate

By 9:00 am, the crew was back on-site finishing Susan's deck. John handed off the final details to James and Andrew and headed out to meet Thad. Thad's going to tag along for a site visit and estimate walk-through.

The pergola at Carla's place was more warped than it looked in the photos. She wanted it removed and replaced with a small, covered patio - solid posts, an asphalt roof, and a few outlets for string lights and a Bluetooth speaker. A basic job, but one where details mattered.

John walked the site slowly, taking notes and visualizing the steps out loud: "Demolition, disposal, new footings, posts, beam, joists & hangers, etc. Oh yes, the gutter, downspout, and power drop". As usual, he took the relevant pics and measurements.

Thad followed him closely, listening, not talking at all. At the truck, John handed him a blank notepad. "This is where the work starts," he said. "Job's already won or lost in the intro, your professionalism, and the estimate."

"I've been meaning to ask," Thad said. "Would you ever teach some of this? Like... formally?"

"I can," John said. "You can tag along today, but if you're serious, you'll need to get into my training program. That's where I lay everything out: pricing, systems, creating your branding, and customer retention. It's not just about swinging tools."

Thad nodded. "I am serious."

"Then we'll surely have lots to talk about."

## Branding & Trust

Carla stepped outside as John was wrapping up. She glanced at the trailer, the logo, and the company name on his work shirt.



"You're the first person I've talked to who looks like he has an actual business."

John nodded. "That's the idea. The branded shirts, clean truck, and straightforward yet organized estimates are just the introduction. What matters long-term is the relationship. Earned trust and great service, over time."

She smiled. "That's the kind of contractor I want to work with."

## Back at Susan's

The crew had finished securing the last rail cap. Philip was sweeping debris off the path while James ran a final check on the post fasteners. John walked the perimeter slowly, tapping boards and checking finish cuts. It was clean. Square. Solid.

Susan came out with a coffee in her hand. "I think it's beautiful," she said.

John nodded. "Turned out very well. You'll need to let it weather a bit before staining - for a few months at least. If we hit a rainy patch, you will have to wait until it dries again."

"Oh - I didn't realize."

"No rush," he said. "Better to do it once and do it right. I'd recommend a clear or semi-transparent stain for this one. There are great grain patterns in this wood."

Philip finished the cleanup and gave John a nod. John returned it.

"You recovered," he said.

Philip gave a tired grin. "Getting there."

"That's the spirit," John replied.

# Contractor's Corner

## **Apprentice Reminder:**

Show up even if you're tired. Work smart. Stay useful. That's how it starts.

## **Estimating Insight:**

Don't price your projects based on what they look like. Price them based on what it takes to do the job right... once.

## **Client Perspective:**

Branding is the handshake. Trust is what keeps you hired.

## **Pro Tip:**

Never stain a new deck too soon. Let it season - then seal it right.

## **John's Note:**

Build the estimate like you'll build the job - measured, clear, and solid. That's how you sleep at night. That's how you scale.

06

# Chapter 6 – The Callback



## Featuring Philip, John & Susan

After some thought and a couple of other contractor estimates, John's estimate for Peter's project had been approved. John had slotted it in right after Susan's deck wrapped up. It was now Wednesday morning, and the crew was halfway through framing Peter's covered outdoor workspace - the one beside his garage.

The posts were set, and Peter was out back occasionally watching as the frame came together. James was on the layout. Andrew handled the post-to-beam brackets. John was on-site, but his attention was split.



Susan had texted the night before.

“Hi John, a couple of the stair treads are splitting. Nothing urgent, just thought you should know.”

John replied that someone would swing by in the morning.

## The Assignment

“Philip,” John said, checking his watch. “You’ve got a side run this morning.”

Philip looked up from sorting joist hangers. “Where to?”

“Susan’s place. Two stair treads are showing cracks. Take the impact, pry bar, 3-inch deck screws, and two new treads that I put in the box of your truck.”

Philip nodded and grabbed the gear.

John paused. “Take your time. Clean work. Make it look like we were never there.”

## The Repair

Susan met Philip with a smile and a coffee in hand, which she offered, but he politely declined.



“They’re just starting to split,” Susan said, pointing to the bottom two treads.

Philip crouched, inspected the boards, and nodded. They hadn’t failed, but the cracks were spreading. He worked methodically: prying, setting the new boards, screwing them in flush, cleaning up every sliver of debris. By the time John arrived to check the work, Philip was already sweeping the path.

John eyed the treads. Perfect match. Clean install.

“Good,” he said. “Load up and head back. I’ll talk to Susan.”

Philip gave a small nod and carried his tools back to his truck.

Before jumping into his truck, Philip looked back with a sense of satisfaction at a job well done. He was happy to be in the company of men who knew the trades and were willing to share their expertise.

On his drive back, Phillip racked his brain trying to come up with at least one of his friends who would be interested in joining the crew. Sure, he knew lots of guys, but who would fit in and appreciate the opportunity to learn as he worked? Thinking!

# The Conversation

John met Susan on the porch.

“That’s all taken care of,” he said.

“Thanks again,” she said. “I just wanted to let you know. I figured it wasn’t a big deal.”

“It’s not,” John said. “But we like to stay ahead of small problems before they grow legs.”

He paused, then added, “Wood’s like that. You can pick the straightest board in the stack, and three weeks later it splits on you. Can’t always see it coming.”

Susan nodded. “I figured as much.”

“This one’s on us,” John continued. “But down the road, if anything else pops up, we’ll need to charge for repairs. Nothing crazy - just fair time and materials. I just like to be upfront.”

Susan smiled. “That’s more than fair.”



## Back on Site

Philip was already sorting scrap wood when John returned to Carla's job. James looked over at John and raised an eyebrow.

"Is she happy?"

"Always," John said. "She's the kind of client that brings you more work three years from now."

Philip asked, "Was everything okay?"

"You did well," John said, not slowing his pace. "Next time though, sweep the underside of the stairs too - wood chips from the demo and old deck screws like to gather under there."

Philip grinned. "Noted."

# Contractor's Corner

## **Material Truth:**

Wood moves. Things split. That doesn't mean the job was bad - just that you stay ready.

## **Customer Service Insight:**

It's not about doing free work. It's about doing the right work and communicating clearly.

## **Training Moment:**

Let the apprentice fix what he's ready for. Then check it. That's how he grows.

## **John's Note:**

Repairs aren't just service - they're strategy. If you handle the callback well, you just secured your next referral.

**07**

# **Chapter 7 – Training Days**



## Featuring John, Peter, and the Crew

By 11:30 am, the crew was moving. Peter's outdoor workspace was starting to take shape - posts in, beams secured, and the roof framing prepped. James, the lead hand, was in full stride, running the crew without needing to check over his shoulder.

Peter stepped out from his garage, curious as he looked the crew over. He eventually walked over to James.

"Haven't seen John this morning. Everything all right?"



James looked up from what he was doing. "John is fine. He said he'd be here by 12:30. He had a training session this morning - a new guy started in his Handyman Business Training Program."

Peter raised his eyebrows. "Didn't know he was teaching now."

James shrugged. "Been doing it for a while. It fits him."

Peter turned back toward the building. "Interesting."

## By the Book

At exactly 12:27 pm, John's truck pulled up.

He stepped out with a clipboard and greeted the crew quickly, eyes scanning the progress. The framing was clean. Everything looked safe. James had things flowing like clockwork.

John moved through his usual checks, made a few notes, and circled back toward Peter, who was leaning against the garage.

"You run this place like a machine," Peter said.

John gave a half-smile. "That's the goal."

Peter hesitated a second, then added, "So this training program - you're coaching guys now?"

"Yeah," John said. "Finished a session this morning with a new guy - Thad. We meet over video, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings until the training is complete. One hour per session." Thad has a clear head; he'll do well.

Peter looked surprised. "Only an hour?"

John nodded. "Bite-size pieces. That's all it takes to get the wheels turning. I'm not teaching them how to frame a house - I'm teaching them how to build an efficient business. Structure, pricing, branding, estimating, customer follow-up, and developing a social media presence. The stuff experience teaches you best. There's a lot of work out there. I'm just preparing them for their journey."

Peter raised an eyebrow. "So, you just... give them the blueprint?" Sounds like you're giving away the farm. "It's not free," John said, straight-faced. "It's fairly priced, and for a self-starter, it delivers what they need. Some people need more training than others, and that's okay. I teach them what they need to start building their own brand name. I offer support moving forward as well. Keeps them on track."



Their alternative is to dump tens of thousands into a franchise system. Both methods will work eventually. My route ensures they're building THEIR brand, not someone else's. Sorry if I sound bitter. I traveled that journey with my own company several years back, but pivoted at the right moment. I felt that too much emphasis was placed on protecting the franchise brand at the expense of the franchisee. In reality, much more attention should be placed on supporting the business owner where they are and in streamlining their success path. It was a paradigm shift for me." John said.

## A Door Opens

Peter scratched the side of his jaw, thinking.

"I've got a colleague in another city," he said finally. "His daughter's a carpenter. Been working on crews for the last couple of years, but she's thinking about going out on her own. Wants to get into renos - kitchens, bathrooms, that kind of thing."

John nodded slowly. "That's a great niche! Is she serious?"

"Very. Just overwhelmed by where to start."

"Have her reach out," John said. "If she's committed, we can work with that. Doesn't matter where she's based - the video training makes remote training possible."

Peter smiled. "I'll pass that along. I think this would give her a great advantage."

# Contractor's Corner

## **Leadership Insight:**

A well-run crew is a reflection of systems, not constant supervision.

## **Business Truth:**

You don't need to teach everything - just the parts that help them grow.

## **Mentorship Tip:**

The most valuable part of training isn't the information - it's the ongoing access to guidance.

## **John's Note:**

If you can help someone avoid five years of hard lessons by giving them a few good hours a week, that's worth its weight in gold.

**08**

# **Chapter 8 – Tools of the Trade**



## Featuring John & Philip

They were slightly behind schedule, and John didn't feel at ease.

Not because progress was bad - far from it. But behind-schedule jobs had a way of inviting shortcuts or sloppiness if you weren't careful. Despite this fact, halfway through the third morning on Peter's build, John decided to spend some time with Philip.

"Philip," he said. "Grab your tools. Let's go over them a bit."



Philip nodded and set his toolbox on a fold-out table. He had a decent selection for an apprentice - neither overloaded nor disorganized. But John could tell some tools hadn't been touched in a while, and others were showing more wear than they should.

John leaned in towards the open box. "What's this?" he asked, holding up a dirty and abused utility knife. "Exacto knife," Philip replied. "Been meaning to swap the blade."

"If it's dull, it's dangerous," John said, replacing it with one from his truck. "Also, I'd like you to wrap the old one in painter's tape so that no one cuts themselves on it when you chuck it in the trash. And let's always remember not to leave blade snaps on the ground, for everyone's safety... including the customer's pets."

# The Review

The next 20 minutes became a walk-through of tools - not just names and uses, but purpose.

- Glazing bar vs. pry bar: “This one’s for finesse. That one’s for demolition.”
- Dripless caulking gun: “If it doesn’t run clean, toss it. A \$10 gun can ruin a \$5,000 finish.”
- Channel-lock pliers: “Two sizes minimum. You’ll thank yourself when you’re under a sink.”
- Tape varieties: John pulled out blue painter’s tape, Teflon tape, electrical tape, and Tuck Tape. “Wrong tape equals wasted time and materials.”

Philip listened, absorbed, and asked a few questions. John kept the pace conversational but direct.

“See this?” he said, holding up his laser level. “Worth every penny. If your eyes are off by 1/2 inch on something, the laser doesn’t lie.” Lasers are also great for setting up T-bar ceilings, measuring ceiling drops around HVAC, deck ledgers, and even for establishing reference points for exterior siding installations.



## More Than a List

They moved through more gear: drywall tools, sanding gear, tile tools, and a full set of driver and drill bits organized like a military kit. There were mentions of painting supplies, masonry basics, an electrical tick tracer, stud finder, shims, hammers, drop cloths, and an assortment of ladders - tools chosen not for bulk, but for purpose.

John held up his multi-master tool.

“Swiss Army knife of the jobsite,” he said. “Clean cuts in tight spots. Can save your backside more times than I can count.”

He pointed at Philip’s cordless tools. “These Makitas yours?”

“Some were gifted. The rest I bought when they were on sale.”

“I’m a Milwaukee man myself, but it’s more important to pick a brand and commit. Batteries, warranties, consistency - it all matters once you expand your platform.”



John could've rattled off 50 more tools and what they were used for - the ones that only come up once every few jobs but are absolute lifesavers when you need them. But he didn't. Not yet.

He just wanted to plant the seed - the idea that every tool has a reason, and every tool you carry should have a purpose.

## The Philosophy

"Tools aren't about gear," John said. "They're about flow."

Philip looked up.

"If your gear slows you down, it costs you twice: once in labour, once in frustration. If it speeds you up but looks sloppy, it costs you in callbacks. You need the right tool at the right time, and you need to have the right mindset." Also, a good rule of thumb is... that if you're struggling with a tool for too long to do a job... you're using the wrong tool.

He gestured toward the trailer.

"Everything in there earns its space. The same should be true for your kit. Don't carry junk. And if it breaks twice, replace it once with something that'll last."

Philip nodded slowly. "That makes sense."

"Grab one of the caulking guns out of my truck. They're pro. Add it to your kit." John also handed him a tube of the good caulk and a roll of painter's tape.

"I'll get you to caulk some trim later. Clean the surface first. Sometimes you tape the edge, sometimes you don't need to. Run your bead thin and clean. If you use tape, peel it off at an angle after 5 minutes. We'll work on techniques. Caulking a tub is different. For that you caulk, spray with glass cleaner, and wipe. Silky finish!"

Philip grinned. "That's the pro move?" "That's the difference between getting paid and getting referred."



## A Quiet Click

A few minutes later, John stepped away to take a call near the truck. James, working under the deck, needed a section of skirtboard trimmed tight into a corner where a circular saw wouldn't fit.

Before James could ask, Philip grabbed the multi-master tool John had talked about earlier, lined it up, and made the cut in two clean passes. James looked over. "Nice work," he said, almost surprised. Philip just nodded and kept moving.

When John came back, James said as they crossed paths, "Our guy's getting sharper."

John didn't say much - just shot a glance over to Philip and gave a quick nod, the kind that said, "Yeah. He's getting it." It's a rite of passage thing.

# Contractor's Corner

**Tool Rule:**

If it slows you down, upgrade it. If it never gets used, remove it.

**Mentorship Moment:**

The best teachers don't just hand you tools - they teach you what to do when the tools aren't enough.

**Pro Insight:**

Your tools should reflect the work you want to be hired for, not the work you're trying to avoid.

**John's Note:**

You don't need to impress people with how many tools you own. You impress them by knowing which one to reach for - and when.

09

# Chapter 9 – The Referral Game





## Featuring John, Philip, and a new client named Carla (returning)

The call came mid-morning - not from a stranger, but from Carla, whose pergola John had quoted and removed earlier in the season. Her neighbor, a man named Rick, had admired the progress and wanted a recommendation.

"I told him you were fair, fast, and clean," Carla said. "He'd like you to come by."

John appreciated the referral, and by early afternoon, he was pulling up to Rick's place.

## The First Impression

The house was modest, but the yard looked riddled with unfinished projects. A stack of old bricks leaned against a half-painted shed, and the deck steps had two different handrails - one wood, one metal.

Rick waved him around back and got right to it. "I need the fence replaced, two gates installed, and maybe the shed redone. Not sure yet."

John nodded slowly, surveying the yard. It was doable, but nothing was clean. Every corner of the yard was a maybe... maybe I want this job, maybe I don't.

"I'd like to use my supplied lumber. I also have a buddy who can get lumber cheap, and he said he can lend me his nail gun. I can help haul the lumber as well, if that helps."

Rick kept talking.

John held up a hand. "Let me stop you there." Rick blinked.

"I run a professional service. We use professional-grade materials and trusted tools. We don't mix and match our building materials."

Rick chuckled. "Come on, it's just a fence."

John looked him square in the eye. “Exactly. And I’ve been building fences long enough to know when one’s not going to go well. I don’t think I’m your guy for this one. Sorry Rick.”

## Walking Away Clean

Back in the truck, John didn’t feel disappointed - he felt clear. Saying no had taken him years to master. In the early days, he’d say yes to anything with a check attached. That’s how he learned the hard way that not all work is good work.

## Debriefing the Crew

Back on Peter’s jobsite, Philip was loading off-cuts when John returned.

“New client?” he asked.

John shook his head. “Referral went sideways.”

Philip frowned. “Didn’t want to pay?”

“Worse - wanted to pay, but on his terms. His lumber, his schedule, his guy with a nail gun.”

Philip raised an eyebrow.



“What’d you say?”

“I took a pass.”

Philip nodded slowly. “That’s allowed?”

“It’s necessary sometimes.”

## The Real Referral Game

John pulled out a Sharpie and scribbled a note on the inside flap of his estimate binder:

“The wrong job can cost more than no job at all.”

He glanced up at Philip.

“People think referrals are always gold. But a referral just means someone noticed your name. They still have to earn your time.”



# Contractor's Corner

**Referral Rule:**

A good client tells their friends about you. A great client tells the right friends about you.

**Professional Boundary:**

You're not here to make every job work. You're here to make the right jobs work well.

**Establishing Authority:**

The moment you let the client lead your process, you've given them the reins to your reputation.

**John's Note:**

It's okay to walk away. There's more (better) business coming - and you need to be available for it.

10

# Chapter 10 – Rain Delay



## Featuring John, Philip, Carla (by message), and Thad (offscreen)

By 7:00 am, the sky was the color of wet concrete, and the rain hadn't let up since midnight. John stood at the shop door, coffee in hand, watching the downpour bounce off the hood of his truck.

James had already texted.

"Are we staying put? Nothing we can do in this."



John agreed. Wet lumber, muddy ground, and open framing were a no-go. Safety first in this case, but that didn't mean the day was wasted.

## Desk Days

Back at his home office - a small, clean space carved out of the back corner of the garage - John flipped open the laptop, clicked into his estimate folder, and got to work.

Invoices.

Follow-ups.

An updated materials list for Peter's job.

Calendar time slots are blocked off for video trainings with Thad.

He knocked out three email replies and flagged a fourth one - from Carla.

“Just wanted to say that the covered patio is holding up beautifully in this rain. You guys did a great job. I’ve already told my sister about you.”

John smiled.

That was the payoff. Not likes, not claps - just quiet confidence from a client who knew they’d hired the right crew.

## Crew Check-Ins

Around 9:15 am, John swung by the jobsite. James and Philip were surprisingly there, doing a light cleanup and organizing tools.

“You two could’ve slept in,” he said.

James grinned. “Figured we’d keep the edges clean. Makes tomorrow smoother.”

Philip was sorting drill bits, nails and caulking. “Do we toss the half-used ones?”

John shook his head. “If it looks usable, put painter's tape over it and keep it. Just keep the junk from looking like inventory.” He paused, then added, “Rain days don’t build decks. But they build habits. Thanks for doing a good job, guys.”

Philip gave a small nod and kept sorting.

## Thad's Progress

Later that day, John reviewed the notes from Thad's last session.

The guy was dialed in - pricing his own jobs now, reviewed his first logo draft, and even customized the estimating sheet that John emailed him.

Thad had messaged: "Had to reschedule a job due to rain - used the time to research some pricing. Never would've done that before. Felt good."

John typed a quick reply:

"That's how you grow - not just when the sun's out."

## Tomorrow's Weather

The forecast said showers would break by morning.

John glanced at the cleaned-up tool trailer, his cleared inbox, and the quiet order of a business still moving - even if the wheels weren't on gravel that day.

He picked up a notepad and scribbled across the top:

"Slow days don't mean lazy days."



# Contractor's Corner

## **Downtime Rule:**

The weather doesn't decide your momentum - your mindset does.

## **Team Insight:**

Crews that organize in the rain build faster in the sun.

## **Mentorship Note:**

If you teach someone how to use their off days, they'll own their busy ones.

## **John's Note:**

You don't get paid to work in the rain. You get paid because you know what to do when it rains.

11

# Chapter 11 – The Pivot



## Featuring John and Thad (via video session), with a brief mention of Philip

Thad logged in early.

It was the third week of consistent video meetings, and this time, he wasn't just looking for advice. He had a decision to make.

"I've got more leads than I can handle," Thad said. "I'm booked out for six weeks, and I'm turning people away."

"Good problem to have," John said.

"Yeah. But now I'm wondering if it's time to bring someone on."

John leaned back, arms crossed.

"You sure?"

"I think so," Thad said. "I've got a guy in mind. He's worked under me on a couple of small projects. He's not great, but he shows up."

"That's not enough," John said. "Not anymore."

## The Conversation

For the next 40 minutes, John didn't sugarcoat anything.

Hiring meant:

- Training
- Accountability
- Insurance
- Payroll
- Protecting the brand
- Managing their screw-ups without blaming the customer

“It’s not about what they do when you’re watching,” John said. “It’s about what they do when you’re not. That’s what represents you.”

Thad nodded slowly, taking it in.

“What would you do?” he asked.

“I’d start with a week on contract. Call it a trial run so that you can see how he moves and how he thinks. Will he be an asset or a liability? You don’t marry a hire. You test one.”

## The Philip Reflection



After the call, John walked through the trailer where Philip was wrapping up for the day. He had the ladders stacked tight, screws sorted, and a fresh set of blades tucked in a labeled box.

“Are you running a retail store here?” John asked.

Philip shrugged. “Just keeping it sharp.”

John smiled. “You’d be surprised how many guys wreck their day because they can’t find a bit or saw blade. Good work, Philip.”

Philip said nothing, but the pride in his work showed. He wasn't just helping anymore. He was starting to own it.

## Getting Back to Thad

John sat down later and sent Thad a follow-up email:

"Hiring is a looking glass that shows you what you've built - or what you haven't."

"Make sure your system's tight before you plug someone into it. If you don't have one, you'll be too busy fixing their mistakes to see your own."

## Contractor's Corner

### **Leadership Rule:**

Hiring doesn't make you a boss. Training does.

### **Scaling Insight:**

If your system isn't solid, a new hire won't fix it - they'll expose it.

### **Reality Check:**

There's no such thing as a part-time reputation. Your crew is your brand.

### **John's Note:**

Don't hire for your pain. Hire for your potential... then back it up with structure.



**12**

# **Chapter 12 – Legacy & Lessons**



## Featuring John, Philip, Susan (briefly), and a note from Thad

John stopped to check on Susan's stain job. The house was quiet. The deck - now stained a soft cedar tone - stood out beautifully against the early evening light.

Philip stepped out from the passenger seat, quietly impressed.

"She finally got to it," he said.

"Yep," John replied. "Weather, life, whatever. It happens. But she did it right."

They walked the deck slowly. Everything was still square. Boards flat. Railings tight. The stain had been applied with care. No streaks, no missed edges.

"Did she ever say anything about the repair I did?" Philip asked.

"She did," John said. "She said it looked like nothing ever happened."

Philip smiled, just a little.

## Progress You Don't Announce

Back at the trailer, Philip unloaded without being asked. He didn't talk much anymore while he worked. He didn't need to. He knew he was valued in the company and he was content.



That was growth John respected. Quiet competence.

He glanced at the clipboard Philip had prepped that morning - materials tracked, notes on blade changes, a reminder to check the compressor fitting on the roofing nailer.

No parade. Just responsibility.

## **A Note from Thad**

After supper, John sat at his workbench, organizing receipts and marking follow-ups.

He opened his email and saw a message from Thad.

“Tried the new hire for three days. Didn’t work out. But I learned how unprepared I was. I’ve been tightening things up. Appreciate the reality check.”

John smiled. It wasn’t a failure. It was refinement.

He replied simply:

“Leadership starts with honesty - about your crew, your clients, and yourself.” You’re doing well Thad.

# Legacy Doesn't Shout

John was no longer planning to scale.

No more vans. No more 75-page franchise agreements or franchise show bookings.  
No national expansion.

He'd been down that road once - the trade shows, the consultants, the binder-thick operating manuals. Over \$250,000 was spent chasing the dream of duplication. He'd turned down 24 applicants who wanted to buy in.

Something about it never sat right.

Now, he teaches others to build their brands. Cleaner. Leaner. More honest.



He flipped open his notepad and jotted a working title:

**"10 Things I Wish I Knew Before Starting My Handyman Business."**

Perhaps that'll go out as an ad for Handyman Business Trainees soon.

Philip walked by, locking up the trailer.

“Are you heading out?” John asked.

“Yep. All tied down. See you at 7:30 am.”

John nodded. “Good work today.”

Philip gave a small wave and disappeared down the driveway.

## Contractor’s Corner

### **Final Truth:**

Success isn’t a number. It’s a name. Your name, on something that lasts.

### **Mentorship Rule:**

The best thing you can build in this business or life is someone better than you.

### **Legacy Principle:**

Don’t just leave something behind. Leave someone better prepared. The best example I can provide is my son. He is, and will continue to be, more amazing than I ever was!

### **John’s Final Note:**

You can keep chasing more... or you can build something solid and show others how to do the same.

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