

# 50plus Handyman



## Estimate or quotation?

**50plus Handyman director Roger Runswick discusses what customers can reasonably expect to receive in terms of estimates and quotations for home maintenance.**

The words estimate and quotation are often interchanged in common usage so let's start with some definitions:

- an estimate is the sum that the service provider believes will be the cost of the work, but the final bill may vary both up and down depending on what is found when the work is carried out.
- a quotation is an offer to carry out work for a fixed price, although certain terms and conditions may be included to reduce the risk of the service provider such that he may reasonably ask for additional fees to cover unforeseen circumstances.

We would all like a fixed price for work. When can this be provided and what is it reasonable to expect? The answer lies in what can be costed within reasonable limits; i.e. to what extent can the works can be clearly defined. We can produce a list of examples with the former being the easier to cost and therefore more suitable for a quote and the latter being the more difficult and more suitable for an estimate:

- replacement windows
- laminate flooring
- decorating
- simple electrical works
- plumbing repairs.

Ah ha! I hear you say. Surely something simple like changing a tap can't be that difficult to calculate a cost for and hence estimate. Well actually yes it can be. It is possible to replace a tap within half an hour; it is equally possible for the job to take four hours and longer. Why is this you say? Here are two real examples:

- The easy tap replacement. Isolating valve fitted to the supply pipe so one turn of the screw and the water supply is off. The tap nut is accessible and can be unscrewed so the tap comes off. The fitting is of the current standard and the new tap is the same length as old so the pipe meets up. So off with old and on with the new and the jobs done. Simple and cheap!
- The saga. The tap's in place on a good deal of time, probably 20 years or more. There is no isolating valve. The stop cock – oh yes when the kitchen was refitted that was left behind the cupboard, you can probably just see it. But there's no room to turn it and its solid anyway. Water meter? (meaning a nicely accessible outside stopcock). No. Do you know where your outside stop cock is? OK – but we'll need to dig the rubble out of the hole first....and so it goes on. Other variations include inaccessible bath taps (fitted to the bath before the bath was installed, jammed gate valves and many more.

So both estimates and quotations have their place. So how can you as a customer help to ensure that an estimate is accurate or a quotation remains fixed?

The answer to the question is in four parts:

- Think about what you want, plan it before hand, write it down and above all be as accurate as possible

- DO NOT change your mind half way through. Change equals additional cost
- Set reasonable expectations. To take the plumbing example, if you can't turn off the water easily then changing the tap is going to need the stopcock repaired first
- By all means talk to, chat up and/or make tea for, but do not divert the workforce. The 'whilst you are here is it possible to' question is well known and almost guaranteed to remove attention from the job in hand. Either plan ahead or ask when the first job's been completed.

We are all familiar with the rogue tradesman. TV, radio and trading standards exposés do help as do personal references but there is one other way in which you the customer can help. Frankly if customers would stop supporting the black-market a good many of the rogues would cease to function.

And what can the service provider do? Clarity about charging is key. As is honesty in explaining how long a job could take (although sometimes customers do not want to hear). At 50plus Handyman we will, where-ever possible, provide an estimate of how long we think the job will take at the time of the initial call, then have the operative look at the job on site and provide him or her with a 'ceiling' number of hours (and hence cost) which they cannot go beyond without seeking approval.

Finally do talk to the service provider. Don't be afraid to ask pertinent questions and if you don't understand the answer ask for a plain English explanation.

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