

Tailgate Talk with

Michael Emmert Golden Eye Construction



How did you get started in your remodeling career?

I started at age 13 on jobsites with my father. He had retired early from owning retail stores and started a remodeling business with a truck and circular saw. I'm a 3rd generation master carpenter and shipwright. The skills I have learned in wooden boat building have provided me with an in-depth knowledge of carpentry. I also used to build models, which really gives you an eye for the details, and that's especially useful in this industry.

Do you have any formal training?

Not really. I started my first business, a painting company, at age 17 and then branched off into construction. It's basically been 'earn as you learn,' although I have continually sought out classes on 'best practice' business skills. Building things was easy, learning how to run a company and understanding that I'm a business owner, not a carpenter anymore, was a huge milestone.

What are the top 3 skills every remodeler should have?

1. Sales
2. Estimating
3. An eye for detail. As the saying goes, 'the devil is in the details.'

What is your biggest success, or a defining moment in your career?

I brought Shawn McCadden in as a consultant and have seen great growth. He has validated some of our business practices and has suggested systems that have enabled us to be more profitable. It was the best money

I ever spent! (Short of my wife's engagement ring).

What is your biggest failure, and what did you learn from it?

Not having proper contracts and working with less than ideal customers. We now have contracts that protect our company and carefully select customers to work with that fit our business model.

Looking back, what advice would you give your future self about a career in remodeling?

My advice would be to take business and sales courses as soon as possible when you're starting your own business. Understanding the difference from being a carpenter with a business and being a business owner that does carpentry or contracting. If you're really great at being on the site working, then you better hire the right people to run your company; or if you're like me, you may see running your company and having great employees that run projects more beneficial. As Shawn McCadden says "mentor your employees, don't just teach them".

What's your criteria for a successful project?

Profit – we're in business to make a profit. 99% of our customers are happy with their projects and our process. Your clients should be happy to pay you if your company's systems are in place and work properly. The project should always turn out looking great. It's the experience they have that they will talk about, not that in the end the project looked good. Our motto is 'our customers should be happier when we leave than when we initially showed up.' Homeowners get excited when you start the project, and they should be just as excited when the project is completed.

What technologies have had the greatest positive impact on your business?

Computerization. We used to do all our estimates on paper, we are much more efficient now. I can have multiple computer screens for various tasks and our project managers can communicate better and write change orders in the field. We are a technology-forward

company. If you're still coming in with the yellow pad, prospective clients may have already written you off!

What is the best advice you ever received and from whom?

One of the best lines I have ever heard came from a NARI member - "the best jobs I ever had were the ones I never got." I think about that when I am pre-qualifying potential clients. Is the client reasonable, do I really want to partner with them? Building a network of great clients creates a never ending circle of work.

In your opinion, what is the biggest challenge facing the remodeling industry today?

A lack of business knowledge. A good contractor knows how to price a project. The unlicensed 'chuck in a truck' and low-bidders hurt the whole industry. A successful contractor should be able to separate himself from the pack and provide a higher level of service and quality. You have to be willing to put in the time.

How many people are in your crew and office staff?

We have a crew of 9, an office staff of 3 and use an average of 25 to 35 subs daily.

How many jobs per year?

We usually have 2 to 3 'anchor' projects that are major remodels and range from \$300,000 to \$1 million dollars. In addition to the major remodels we have 20+ smaller projects – under \$100,000 – such as decks, kitchens and bathrooms.

Chevy, Ford or Dodge?

Dodge/Ram

Favorite type of jobsite tunes?

My crews like Country and old school Rock and Roll.

Greatest benefit from being a NARI member?

The sharing of information with other like-minded contractors. Plus, the opportunity to meet and work with Shawn McCadden. He verified that some of our systems were on target and tweaked those that weren't. He has helped us build a true "Business System" Our mark-up is now consistent across all projects.