

Remodeling

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At Your Service

Jerry Levine's customer service delights clients like Robin Rains. He and four other remodelers let you in on their secrets—page 88

Tools for Sale

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Working with Suppliers

Smart materials dealers are targeting remodelers—page 76



Where's My Allowance?

Do you offer a tool allowance to your employees?

Q+A

DANNY FEIG-SANDOVAL

owner, Small Carpenters At Large
Atlanta

No. We don't offer a tool allowance, but when an employee needs a tool, we will buy it and work out a reasonable payment schedule for paying for it as a payroll deduction. We have a lot of company tools, but I encourage everyone to have their own tools. Employees take better care of their own equipment. We take care of repairing everyone's tools and provide saw blades, drill bits, and other accessories.

DOUG NELSON

owner, New Spaces
Burnsville, Minn.

Yes. I began offering a tool allowance five years ago when my own tools were worn out and tools were disappearing. A person will take better care of his own equipment than someone else's — it's human nature. Many carpenters struggle when they are hired and can't afford to own tools. If they have better saws and better guns, they do a better job for us. The quality of the work is higher and productivity increases. New Spaces takes care of the wear parts such as saw blades and drill bits.

I decided on \$42 per month, which comes to \$500 per year. (It's accrued so a new employee won't buy a tool then quit.) You should be able to replace one significant tool once a year and have some fun money. My employees keep better track of this than any other benefit. They also shop for the best price because it's their own money.

TIM SWEENEY

owner, Sweeney Construction Corp.
Madison, Wis.

No. We provide all power tools to our crews, so we're taking care of their needs. I know what we have and the quality of the equipment, and I can dictate that they use proper safety techniques. Our employees don't have to own several thousand dollars' worth of equipment. We also take care of repairs of the tools for those who wish to use their own tools. I'm in the process now of polling guys to find out what we need. We might spend \$15,000 to \$20,000 per year on new purchases and repairs for our 12 field employees, and that includes retrofitting of our vehicles and vans.

PAUL ERIC MORSE

president, Morse Constructions
Somerville, Mass.

Yes. We started offering an allowance three years ago as an incentive to lure carpenters to work for us and stay with us. We give them \$25 per week. They do not receive cash if they can't use the allowance. It's only for tools, repairs, or work clothing. Our carpenters often wait until they have enough saved up for a new saw or nail gun. Our seven carpenters have improved their selection and take better care of their tools. They use our accounts at different lumberyards or they can submit their receipt. The office manager has a spreadsheet that keeps track of the totals.

PAM MILLER

owner, Alchemy Construction
Santa Rosa, Calif.

No. What I do is provide repair and maintenance costs to employees who use their own tools. Giving them money to buy large tools is not a good investment if they quit. I do buy small things like hammers, pliers, or nail sets to encourage them to stay in the trades — even if they don't continue to work for me.

If it's someone I know will stay, I'll invest more money in him or her. It varies from person to person. For someone who is really hard on their tools, I'd be hesitant to spring for maintenance and repair for them. I find if they are not willing to take care of their tools, they're not willing to take care of my tools.

JACK PHILBIN

president, Philbin Construction
& Remodeling
Crestwood, Ill.

No. I used to supply all the power tools and accessories, but I was losing thousands of dollars every year. The abuse of my tools was incredible — they were constantly in for repair. Now I tell my employees to supply their own tools. I have power tools, but they are under lock and key and I keep control of them. At the end of the year, based on my discretion, I'll make decisions to give some employees about \$200 and let them decide what to buy. New tools improve productivity. This is how I try to make sure they are up to speed.