

JOAN
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Offer advice as a partner, not an expert

Q. How should I go about giving my boss advice? Our company is experiencing a problem, which is similar to one I have dealt with before with a previous employer. My experience at my previous job would have placed me in a position above my current boss. I know how to solve the problem we are facing due to past experience but I do not want to be viewed as a pushy employee. What is a tactful, yet strong way of showing him how to proceed without making him defensive?

A. There can be only one reason you are hesitating to step in and help your boss solve this problem: his previous behavior must be telling you he won't receive your input well. Otherwise this shouldn't be an issue. If he hasn't demonstrated that he's defensive, perhaps you are over-sensitive about being assertive. In any event, the best way to approach your boss is as a partner, not an "expert." There is a possibility that this situation is different from the one you were exposed to before, and you don't want to come across as a know-it-all.

For example, you could say, "How is that XYZ issue coming...? (Listen for details and ask specific questions that will tell you if your solution idea will work.) ...You know, this problem sounds a lot like something I worked on before in my last job. I wonder if that solution would work on this problem. Maybe it would be worth it to spend a few minutes talking about how that problem is similar to this one. You're closer to the problem and could tell if this idea would work."

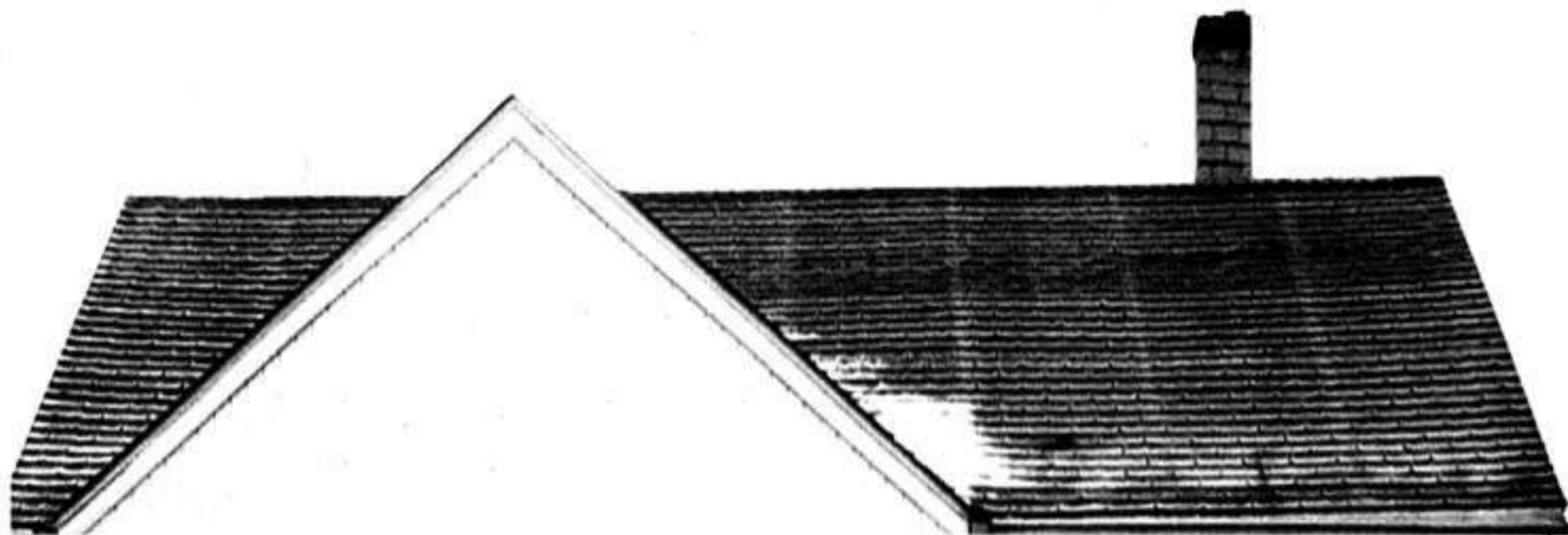
In this way, you've opened the door without sounding pushy. As you talk about the problem, listen carefully for the differences between this problem and the other situation. Sometimes we wed ourselves to a solution we've used before because we fool ourselves into thinking the issues are the same.

Another trap some people fall into is constantly talking about their former place of employment until their boss and co-workers want to say, "If it was so great there, why don't you go back?"

After you've listened carefully, and if you feel that the solution you've used before is the right approach, talk about the benefits as well as the risks and negative consequences. This will build your credibility as a thoughtful problem-solver who can be relied upon to provide a balanced view of all sides of the issue.

If your boss is smart, he will recognize how much you have to offer and will seek out your opinions and expertise as a matter of course. Start making your boss look good and you'll look good, too.

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Some ideas hot, some not

Designs that add comfort popular
as stay-at-home trend grows

By ALISON LAURIO
Freeman Staff

PEWAUKEE - The hottest home design trends might not come to southeastern Wisconsin any time soon - if at all.

While some ideas could catch on here, others - like a glass wall in the master bedroom which was at the International Builders' Show in Las Vegas - probably won't, said Ann Rodrigues, vice president of David & Goliath Builders Inc.

The show serves as the convention of the National Association of Home Builders.

New design trends typically originate on the West Coast and spread to the rest of the country, often times hitting the Midwest last.

"The Milwaukee area, for the most part, is pretty conservative," Rodrigues said. "People here don't grasp a lot of these trends. If they do, it's a lot later than on the East Coast and West Coast."

The homes she saw at the show had a distinct southwestern feel and some elements she thinks will never catch on here.

"They were decor-type things, like small (1-inch-by-1-inch) tiles," Rodrigues said. "They were showing them everywhere - around fireplaces and everywhere in the house. They were too busy and there were too many grout lines."

One house had some "far out things," she said. "In the master bedroom, there was a whole wall that was glass," Rodrigues said. "There was a whirlpool on the deck, a whirlpool inside and two shower walls were glass - with the neighbors right on top of you. I think they were catering to an entirely different market than here."

Al Eckhart, owner of Woodhaven Homes & Realty Inc. of North Prairie, did something different in his Parade of Homes house last year: he built a "smart home."

With one call while driving home from work, the owner can turn on the oven, lights and stereo system. Once inside the kitchen, everything from air temperature and lights to the security system can be controlled with a touch-screen computer.

"I did something that a lot of people had never seen before," Eckhart said. "They were intrigued by it. But when they found out the price, they were not as intrigued. It was pre-sold so I was not worried."

He did not get any orders to



Alison Laurio/Freeman Staff

Ann Rodrigues, vice president of David & Goliath Builders Inc., Pewaukee, shows a photo of the dining room in the company's 2003 Parade of Homes house. Because one design trend is to move away from formal dining rooms, some homes are built with a flexible space - where the room can easily be converted to another use.

Trends in new homes

- Flex spaces: Rooms that can easily be changed to another use, like a formal dining room turned into an office or a loft area changed into a den
- Great rooms: Large family-use rooms often included instead of formal living rooms
- Offices for the whole family: with computer desks and hook-ups, storage and work spaces for everyone, including the kids
- Customized garages: Larger, more organized - including design-your-own systems that get everything off the floor, and some with extras like heated floors, sound systems and bars
- Gourmet kitchens: Walk-in pantries and big refrigerators and stoves
- Lighting: More rope lights and lighting trays with lots of dimmers for softer effects
- Outdoor living: Hot tubs, fire pits, stone pavers instead of concrete and more outside areas to spend time in as living goes to the outside

Source: Ann Rodrigues, vice president, David & Goliath Builders

build with the smart systems, which cost between \$60,000 and \$150,000, although another builder who brought people through did.

"I didn't do it for that," Eckhart said. "I did it to show people what's out there."

Eckhart is using some of the trend ideas he was aware of and went to Las Vegas to see, including textured finishes on walls - not wallpaper - and customized cabinets with a three-step, hand-rubbed finish.

A new effervescent tub, different from the massaging whirlpool types, may become

trendy, Eckhart said.

"It's a relaxation tub, with interior lights and bubbles," he said. "You can turn off the lights and light some candles and relax and enjoy the bubbles and colored lights."

The bubbles are small ones that collect on your body, like champagne bubbles that gather on the side of the glass, Eckhart said.

Rodrigues said people are asking for more luxurious master baths.

"They want steamers, multiple shower heads," she said. "They want two people to be able to take

Remodeling to stay

Homeowners tailoring their houses
to suit long-term living

By MITCH MAERSCH
Freeman Staff

WEST BEND - A growing number of homeowners are making long-term commitments to their abodes and are willing to spend the money tailoring their houses to suit them perfectly.

David Pekel, vice president of the Milwaukee Chapter of the National Association of the Remodeling Industry, said people are investing more into their homes today - both inside and out - because they're living in them longer.

He said in many cases people are focusing on sprucing up the landscaping and other outdoor aspects of their homes when undergoing a remodeling project.

"People are starting to introduce more of what we refer to as water effects, which would be ponds. There's a greater use of accent and landscape lighting and hardscaping - brick paver or stamped and patterned concrete versus plain



Sam Castro/Freeman Staff

Merri Jo Rodenkirch, left, and Steve Miller of Miller's Floor Coverings in Kewaskum chat for a moment at their exhibit at the Washington County Home Builders Expo recently.

a shower at the same time."

Highly organized storage space is another trend, Rodrigues said.

"They don't just want a closet with a pole in it," she said. "They want poles and cubbies and shelves in the bedroom, in the pantry - everywhere. And they want the same kind of organization for their kids. Everybody has their own little organized area in the mud room."

The move toward more com-

city cement sidewalks," Pekel said. "People are spending as much time, and in certain cases money, on the outside of their home as on the inside of their home."

He said upgrading kitchens and bathrooms is popular.

There's a movement to higher-end fixtures - multi-sinks and faucets, heated flooring in bathrooms, spa-style tubs, separate tubs and showers, multi-body spray shower heads and increasing the shower size to accommodate more than one person, he said.

Kitchens and family rooms are being expanded to allow for more open space.

Many people are remodeling the lower levels of their homes for home theaters and fitness centers, complete with bathroom and kitchen areas, he said.

"It allows adults and children to entertain friends at the same time without getting in each other's way," he said.

There's a greater interest in providing a home office space as well, whether it be for taking work home or paying bills, he said.

Convenience, durability, low maintenance and higher quality without sacrificing appearance sums up some of the trends in the home construction industry.

"Convenience is definitely high on the list," said Julie Kreft, executive director of the West Bend Area Builders Association. Those can include dryers that set themselves for certain times and ovens that can be set to defrost and cook food while you're away.

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fortable homes has been the trend since the 9-11 attacks, when people started staying home more, Rodrigues said.

"I think home has become very important," she said. "It always was, but now it's even more. It makes it hard to go on vacation because it's hard to top this beautiful house."

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