



Sid Bourne on the importance of qualifications

Mean customer living in a £2.5m mansion

I HAVE been working in my new role as independent inspector and NVQ assessor for several months now. As with all new business ventures it has been tough, but very rewarding and I am now starting to see the results.

The most enjoyable part of my work is assessing installers for their NVQ qualification in flooring. I have met so many really nice people doing this and it has opened my eyes to how things work today compared with the 'good old days'.

The installers I meet are genuinely good people, and often I have seen installers who actually have higher standards than those they are expected to work to.

Installers are governed by the retailer or contractor they work for, who, in turn, are governed by the customer or client who wants everything cheap as possible. But when it goes wrong they raise the roof and demand compensation!

Some installers I have assessed are nervous that they may fail due to no fault of their own. But I explain that it is about competence in floorlaying and in the circumstances in which they are working.

I have also met many good installers who have always wanted a recognised qualification, but were worried

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that they won't pass. It's true that if you are not competent you won't pass. Even so, we will then help you to improve by getting the correct training.

It is great to meet and to talk to these installers. I try to put them at their ease and I remind them that I too am an installer. When I was starting out I used to freak out if someone mentioned a test or qualification.

It's a question of having confidence in your own ability. It amazes me that many of these guys, however good they are, just don't seem to believe in themselves and their ability.

I was out with an installer the other day; he was concerned he would fail because the subfloor was not as he would like it, but the customer refused to pay for plywood, saying it was too expensive. The customer in this instance just happened to live in a massive house worth over £2.5m in acres of land.

On entering the mansion on this enormous estate, I noticed what I thought was really bad workmanship by the builder. Yes, you guessed it, Bob the Builder had installed a solid wood floor which was cupping really badly.

He had not left expansion gaps and the doors were not square in the frames, and so on.

I then checked and discovered that the subfloor was not too bad, yet this installer had been panicking. I advised him to go ahead and do what he planned to do. So he mixed the compound and applied it all over the chipboard floor to fill in the gaps and the screw holes, etc.

At that moment the customer walked in, inspected the work and commented: 'That looks good. I told you I did not need plywood.'

But, being very professional, the installer responded that there could still be a problem if the chipboard moved and the joints began to show through. That, he said, was the reason he recommended installing plywood.

But the customer wasn't having it. 'No thanks. I cannot afford it. The way you have done it will be fine.'

'I get this all the time,' the installer told me later. In this case he had managed to get over the problem, although not to his usual high standard. But the end result looked really good and his attitude was excellent. So how

can you knock someone for this? We all know that eventually the flooring may break down, but that's life, as they say.

Over the years there has been a major difference regarding what an installer has to do and what he would recommend.

We are all guilty, trying to get the cheapest of everything, and when it goes wrong we blame the product for being useless. We don't consider that we are to blame for choosing the cheapest.

I remember the days when customers who would actually feel insulted if you offered them cheaper alternatives; they only wanted the best and expected top quality workmanship. OK, so I am old, but what a difference a few years make.

Any installer who wants to get the only recognised qualification in flooring is welcome to give me a call. I will help, advise and encourage you, whatever is necessary.

Why is it only in flooring that there are people working without qualifications? Other trades do, so why not us? If you are a competent installer and don't have a qualification, act today. You deserve it. **CFJ**

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John Roberts trade tests Nailers Gel Filled Knee Pads

Highly rated for comfort on your knees

MY first reaction was another variation of a knee pad! I have tried many knee pads over the years and most have been rejected, because they were not comfortable to wear over a few hours or the straps dug into the back of my knee.

These pads did surprise me, as they were very comfortable to wear even after a long period of time. The straps were also the most comfortable I have tried. They did not make my knees sweat which can be very uncomfortable and lead to long term problems.

The rubber cap on the front was comfortable and covered most of the area so I was not rolling off the edges, unlike some pads with small areas of protection on the front.

According to manufacturer, they are not designed for use on carpet or concrete. I can only assume they mean wet concrete and not cured concrete.

I accept they would not be good on carpet because the rubber front pad would grab onto the surface of the carpet.

I would use these pads on the preparation work for carpets taking them off when fitting the carpet.

I must state though that you should always protect you knees, so I would use pads that insert into many of the work trousers that are available.

The reason I would use these knee pads for the preparation work is to prolong the wearability of the trousers and to give extra safety in case you kneel on a nail head or

broken staple which you may not spot.

For all other types of floorcoverings they would be very good.

I am not trying to drum up business for the company, but I suggest having two pairs, one for the preparation work and one for working on the finished flooring. This avoids any risk of embedded debris damaging to the finished product. **CFJ**

John Roberts is a prominent consultant in the flooring trade and founder of TAOFS (The Academy of Flooring Skills), which offers training in all types of floorcoverings.

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