

# THE A-TEAM

## Working With the Right Supplier

By Ramzi Makram-Ebeid



A few days ago, a landscape supplier tagged along with my client's contractor and structural engineer for our update meeting. I wasn't sure why he was there (there was no landscaping in this project), or which monster had brought him. But I knew, for certain, that he had to be silenced. For some reason, he felt obliged to not only interact with us but also object to most of what we said. Between his very vocal objections to sound ideas, and no education nor background in the field, I knew I was in the presence of yet another bull shitter. And he was the worst kind, the kind that speaks with undeserved confidence mixed with a belittling tone. He added nothing, and only made a professional mood turn into a hostile environment. And he is, unfortunately, part of a very large community whose main aim is to waste your time and money, and ensure that you only do standard things with little

attention to quality. And that's exactly the type of person you should avoid when working with a team.

Yes, this is much easier said than done; I'd literally forgo a cure for baldness to work with the right team (not at all, but one must be dramatic when one writes). I'm aware that there's no sure way to stay away from the rare gem I mention above, but here are some pointers to keep it at bay when picking out suppliers for a new project:

First and foremost, you must interview the supplier face-to-face:

See the quality of their previous work. (Do this before even meeting them). If you like that, then meet them. If you see crap, don't expect that you'll be the one who turns their work into perfection.

**Meet.** See if you have chemistry, see if they "get you" and listen to your advice. This isn't teenage "chemistry," I'm talking about cerebral logical chemistry. You need someone who understands that you want a cantilevered bar, which means adding a leg at one end would result in that said bar not being cantilevered. Do the following:

**Recommendations** – Ask your friend or a commercial owner who has a space with the quality that you want, who did his or her contracting. A lot of suppliers work both residential and commercial, and you usually get a better job when you're someone's referral. Most importantly, you not only see their work firsthand but you also get firsthand knowledge of what it's like working with them.

**Relationships** – Just because your friend is awesome as a friend, doesn't mean he or she

is awesome in his or her job. And vice versa.

**Pay** – Yes, pay you cheap a\*\*. If this is your first project specifically, talk to other people who have been through the process so you become more realistic and prepared. Payment also involves priorities. Do all the essentials first, and items that are not urgent (depending on your real needs), can be done at later stages.

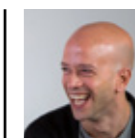
**Flexibility** – If I listened to the amount of no's or mayenfash's I've gotten over the years, all my work would have been slight deviations of what the standards were for each project. You often have to push suppliers to expand their minds and find new solutions with you.

**2 out of 4** – In a perfect world, you'd get someone who is easy to work with, great at

what he/she does, punctual and well-priced. I get a lot of "he's too expensive" from my clients, and I always have to explain that my suppliers are worth every penny. "Great at what he/she does" always has to be one of your defaults. And if that is mixed with any of the other attributes, you're good. So, if the nagar is "great at what he does" and is well priced, wait – cause he will probably be late and difficult to work with.

**Work With What You've Got** – Sometimes you get stuck with a supplier, so you have to work with what you've got. For example, if your painter can only do the basics, get him to do the basics very well.

**Repeat** – Usually the more you work with someone, the better you both understand each other and the better the end project is. So if the last supplier did 70% or above of what you were expecting, try again with him or her. **TL**



With a BA in International Business from GWU and a Professional Interior Design Certification from UCLA, Ramzi established the boutique interior, furniture and product design firm, Human Nature in 2007. Since then, Human Nature has been the designer behind a variety of commercial and residential projects, as well as several bespoke furniture pieces.