



Eight Questions To Ask Your Next Landscaping Company To Protect Yourself From An Unpleasant Experience (And Make Sure You Don't Need To Leave a Bad Google Review Of Your Own) + The Only Answers You Should Accept

1. Are you confident that our project is a good fit for your company?

In the past, we'd taken on anyone as a client who was willing to pay, regardless of what they wanted. This approach kept our revenue flowing but did not set a good platform for the project. A lot of energy was spent adapting to different personalities as opposed to focusing on the project at hand. Both parties must be the winner in any design or installation.

One big change we've made relates to who we accept as new clients. From the initial phone conversation we take the time to dig into what it is a potential client is trying to achieve and how they think we can help them.

If you hire us, our work will start with what we call 'good fit' phone call to ensure that we fully understand what you want and whether we are a good fit for one another. We only move forward with projects that are a good fit for both of us. If a project does not look like a good fit we will do our best to point you in the right direction. No bad feelings, just a recognition that you will be served better by another firm.

2. Do you offer full construction details in your design work?

In the past, we would produce 2D concept drawings for our clients and base our construction on these rough documents. All our planting and hard surface layout was done onsite which on an artistic level works, but it also had an effect on a projects budget which wasn't realized at the time. It's very hard to price a significant landscape element (i.e. retaining wall) without details.

The conceptual plan creates the template for the details, these details are like the icing on a cake. These details increase the visualization and provide necessary information in



order to receive accurate pricing.

We now use some of the most advanced landscape design software available. In some instances, we create 3D site models which give us an accurate overhead or angled views of proposed changes before the work starts so that you know what you're getting.

20 years of experience using these design tools has allowed us to streamline our work which saves you money. Our added skills have also allowed us to take on more complex work including commercial and institutional landscape designs. The design process is very inclusive, your feedback sets the tone for the design itself rather than our image of your site. This is your landscape not ours!

3. Do you collaborate with other designers?

Twenty years ago, mentors were hard to find. Particularly in the landscape industry where most successful business owners were not accessible.

These days, I work with regenerative design mentors on most of my projects which improves my design and business skills while adding value for you. Most drawings have a number of people who review them and provide feedback prior to presenting to a client. The results in a well thought out design that provides our clients with a good fix for their land management problems.

4. Do you have a sound process in place for your design and construction work?

In the past, we could build the best landscapes but we lacked a sound process. Without sound processes in place inconsistencies did arise when dealing with certain situations. Changes in the scope of work was one of the most common situations that occurred, part of us loved this. Change can be a great opportunity from a design perspective, but this created pain for our clients as the final invoices came in.

Over the past decade, I have developed design and construction processes which I clearly lay out at the beginning of every project. These processes streamline almost every part of our business from how a design created to the process of hiring a subcontractor to install stonework. We clearly communicate exactly what the deliverables will be and the timeline. Our project management software helps to ensure that we're delivering on time and budget. All of our installation projects are carefully



managed and from the first day we know our expected completion date and costs.

We have built a strong team with other tradespersons who we can rely on to deliver a quality product for an agreed upon price.

5. Do you offer cost plus or fixed pricing for your work?

In the past, the cost of each project was based on the cost of labour and materials plus and agreed upon percentage. The projects final cost was often much more than what was originally envisioned and created mixed emotions for everyone at the jobs conclusion. "It's what I wanted but more money than I thought..."

These days, I see how important it is for my clients to have the financial security of knowing the cost of their project before we break ground. What this means is that, all of our work is done on a fixed price, whether this is for a landscape design or for an installation, and regardless of the project size. Our proposals and agreements are very clear and state what we will deliver, how much this will cost as well as the payment terms. Nothing hidden, no surprises. Years of producing fixed price estimates means that the we can deliver very accurate prices that provide our company with the estimated revenue while providing high value you. You get the financial security of knowing the cost of your project before we break ground.

6. Do you have all the equipment needed to do this project or do you bring in colleagues to help?

In the past, we had very high overhead. New trucks, new equipment, all sounds good and most people like to see a work crew like this pull up to their door. What is often the case is that the much wanted equipment places a high level of burden on its owners. This burden pressures the business to take on work that is not a good fit, and also creates a situation where there is a direct benefit when a client wishes to add items to a project. An increased flow of revenue was needed to keep our lights on. In the end, this situation did not benefit our company or our clients. We saw our company continually growing to service our increasing debt load.

These days, our overhead is much lower. Lower overhead means you directly benefit from our healthy situation. Jaan Designs is extremely lean and we do not take on



projects that are not a good fit for us or you. We have less expenses which in turn means we need less revenue from each project. You save money and we have a stable future.

7. How do you handle changes to the scope of work during the construction phase?

Changes can happen almost daily as a project evolves, previously we would apply rough pricing to these requested revisions. These changes resulted in increased cost that were not realized at the time when decisions were made. These changes would obscure or hinder a clear project direction. This created unease and no sense of where the project was going in terms of cost.

Nowadays, when changes are identified during an installation (that add or reduce the scope of work) we generate what we call a 'contemplative change order'. This provides you with a fixed price on the identified change and makes it easy for you to determine whether these changes are acceptable or not. All changes require your approval of the contemplative change order. We can then move forward with confidence. No surprises.

8. Are you looking for honest feedback at the conclusion of this project?

In our early years we won every award competition we entered. We could do no wrong, or so we thought. We now realize that awards don't equal happy clients, if you don't ask your clients what their experience was like then how will you ever know? Awards are a recognition for aesthetic achievements, not necessarily if the project met the client's goals. We didn't ask for feedback because it felt awkward given the cost overruns that faced most projects.

These days, it's different for us. At the conclusion of every project, you will be asked for your candid feedback on how the experience of working with us was for you. Did we meet your expectations? How can we improve our service? We often receive feedback such as this..."We tell people that working with you was easy and productive, that you are very professional, and that you have a lot of expertise to solve a variety of problems. In addition, you work with excellent people who deliver quality results and provide the required supervision to ensure that the project is done as designed". Or..."I found Jamie



to be, knowledgeable professional, experienced, has the right philosophy/paradigmatic framework. He's also timely, provides professional support, along with support and inspiration for innovative and environmentally ethical practices.”