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Fencing Contractor Interview Questions

Below are 15 important questions to ask potential fencing contractors and the answers you should expect to receive:

1) **Question:** Do you call the Ontario Dig Line?

Information: Gas lines, electrical, Rogers, Bell, water are the utilities that are buried below grade. If any of these lines are hit while excavating the consequences could be grave!

In Ontario it is the law to get approval before digging. Not only is it law, it is common sense to want to know what is below grade before digging.

Many contractors will ignore this step as it can be a "bit of a hassle" and it takes time to call the Dig Line and it takes time to get the approval to proceed with the excavation. Some contractors will simply look at where the gas meter is and simply stay clear from this area, or do a "light excavation" meaning not go nearly deep enough!

Ask yourself, does this contractor care about the safety of my family and my home?

Answer: As a contractor "if you are excavating a new building, repairing buried infrastructure, landscaping or anything else that requires you to break ground, you must contact Ontario One Call."

Resource: <https://www.ontarioonecall.ca/contractors/>

2) **Question:** Can you provide a drawing of how exactly the fence will be constructed?

Information: If you don't have a drawing of exactly how the fence will be constructed you don't know what you are paying for. Any reputable contractor should be able to provide you with a structural drawing of how the fence will be constructed

Answer: Our technical drawings can be found on our website by [clicking here](#)

3) **Question:** How deep do the footers go into the ground?

Information: The frost line in the GTA ranges approx. 36" to 40" therefore the excavation for the footers should be AT LEAST 42" inches. Our findings indicate that 36" is the typical depth that most contractors excavate. Be very careful of this!

Unfortunately, the Ontario Building Code doesn't specify the footing depth on a fence. However, the Ontario Building Code, when building decking states that the footers must be a minimum of 48" deep.

This is one of the areas that consumers get tricked the most. We've learned that some contractors will provide consumers with an unclear excavation range of “ **32” to 48” based on the soil conditions”**

It is much quicker for the contractor to dig 32" than it is 48" and it costs more money to excavate deeper as it takes more time to dig, it takes more time to remove the additional soil, it costs more money to get rid of the soil, it costs more money for the additional concrete and the labour to install the concrete.

Bottom line is this, less excavation equals much less cost to the contractor, and more importantly a poorly built fence that will not last!

Ask yourself, do you want a contractor who is going to do the bare minimum?

Answer: Green Side Up Contracting excavates as close to 48" as possible

4) **Question:** Do you remove ALL soil from the footing excavation?

Information: When you excavate 48 inches deep with a 10-inch auger there is approx. 1 wheelbarrow full of soil that needs to be removed. On a 100-foot fence with one gate there is approx. 13 posts that need to be dug so that is approx. 13 wheelbarrows of soil that needs to be removed.

13 wheelbarrows of soil equal approx. 1 full yard of soil.

A yard of soil is quite expensive to dispose of, both time and labour, and if your contractor doesn't own a dump trailer, they will have to hire a bin which costs even more.

Many contractors will "**feather the clay off**" around the work area, or they will charge you additional fees to remove the clay.

Answer: Green Side Up Contracting, like any other professional fencing contractor includes soil removal in our price.

5) **Question:** What is the diameter of the footer?

Information: The smaller the diameter of the hole, the less soil that has to be removed, the less concrete that has to be added and ultimately the less secure your fence will be.

Answer: Green Side Up Contracting uses a 10" augur to excavate the footers.

6) **Question:** How far from top grade is the concrete?

Information: We have learned and been seeing that many contractors are not bring the concrete up to, or as close to grade as possible. Many contractors are leaving 7 inches from the top of the grade to the top of the concrete and what this does is two things:

a) saves the contractor time and money as they have less soil to remove and they use less concrete



b) Water will sit on top of the concrete, below grade and over time rot the post. (as you can see in the photo)

Answer: At Green Side Up Contracting, we fill the hole with concrete to as close to top grade as possible — usually 1" or 2" below grade

7) **Question:** Do you use nails or screws to attach the framework?

Information: We found through our research that many contractors pay their builders by piece work, especially those that focus on building in subdivisions. Using a nail gun powered by an air compressor to attach the framework is 100% faster than using a drill and screws.

Time equals money

Answer: Screws should ALWAYS be used to attach the frame work to the post. The reason for this very important structural step is because the post naturally wants to twist and when the post twists, it will twist off a none threaded object like a nail. It is impossible for the frame work to come apart when screws are used.

When the framework starts to pull apart, this is the beginning of the end of your fence.

8) **Question:** Do you use heavy duty hardware on your gates?

Information: Many contractors low grade brackets and latches to save costs.

Answer: A well-built gate should have heavy duty hinges secured with heavy duty screws, and the latch should be a heavy-duty lockable latch!

9) **Question:** Where do you buy your lumber from?

Information: Without naming any names, many stores sell lumber that has been rejected or deemed as second grade by the mill. The fence boards are often thinner and would be deemed as no good by a quality builder. The Sienna Brown stain is often inconsistent. Many times, the second-class material has been picked though by homeowners and contractors, meaning you as the consumer can get material that is second and third grade.

This second-grade material is cheap, it looks terrible, it will deteriorate quickly and is very inexpensive.

Answer: A professional fence builder should be purchasing fencing material in quantity and in some case directly from the mill. This is a sign of a contractor that cares about what they deliver to you. We recommend steering clear of contractors who purchase their material from the local box stores.

10) **Question:** How thick are the fence boards that you use?

Information: To save a substantial amount of money, many contractors are now starting to resort to using THE thinnest fence boards on the market. We are seeing contractors use fence boards that are 1/2" or 3/8"

The standard fence board that you should expect to be used on your fence is 5/8 of an inch thick but So in other words up to a 1/2 inch thinner than what should be used.

This drastically drives the price down!

Answer: All of the fence boards we use are 5/8" thick.

11) **Question:**What are your payment terms?

Information: Based on feedback we've received many contractors expect a 10% to 20% deposit at the time of making an agreement. The next payment would be equal to 50% of the project value, once the project starts, followed by the final payment at the end of the project.

Answer: Green Side Up Contracting takes one payment and that is on the day that the project is completed and final walkthrough is has been conducted.

12) **Question:** If I pay you cash can I save the tax?

Information:This is illegal, and if your contractor is going to break the law so blatantly, we are certain that the contractor wouldn't be afraid to cut corners on your build. It is advised to steer clear from this type of contractor.

Also, if you pay by cash to save the tax you will most likely not receive an invoice. No invoice = no warranty!

Answer: Green Side Up Contracting accepts cash however tax is always added.

13) **Question:**How long is your warranty?

Information:If the footers are dug to the correct depth the concrete is pour to as close to grade as possible and the framework is screwed together, not nailed, your fence should last for 25 years.

Answer: Green Side Up Contracting offers a TEN YEAR structural warranty that covers post heaving and framework integrity.

14) **Questions:**How long has your company been in business?

Information: We see contractors operating under many different business names. In fact, we know a few contractors that have had three or four different business names over the last 10 to 12 years. The reason for this, especially now with the home improvements sites, is that they poor work, they don't promptly respond to warranty claims, the public becomes aware and they reputation is tarnished. Therefore, they change their business name.

Answer: Longevity in a company shows that they know what they are doing. It is our recommendation that you choose a company that has been in business for at least ten years. Green Side Up Contracting has been in business for 21 years.

15) **Question:** How many public reviews do you have on home improvement sites?

Information: Reviews on home improvement sites like HomeStar's are screened to ensure the review, good or bad is a real review. HomeStars will often ask for a copy of the invoice. Google reviews, good or bad can be created by anyone and are not screened.

Answer: When choosing the right fencing contractor, regardless of their reviews, be sure to ask the right questions! Look for consistent, award winning contractors that have a consistently been reviewed. Also take a moment to read the reviews and how the contractor responds to the feedback provide by passed clients.

In closing, I've spent hours informing clients about the basic principles of fence construction. There is only one way to build a fence and that's the right way! If you see a significant price discrepancies, there is a reason why and that has to relate to the quality of workmanship and or the quality of the material.

Don't be shy to ask for their insurance and WSIB information as well!

The shady contractors that are going to cut corners on your build, are those who are offering low pricing per foot pricing. Ask the these 15 questions, make the right decision, and hold your contractor accountable to deliver exactly what they are going to deliver.

I hope this information helps you make the right decision.