

“A House is Guilty Until Proven Innocent”

Ten Lessons Learned From Experience in the Home Inspection Business

Sharon Wolf-Furman



Owning a home inspection company both in Arizona and Pennsylvania for the past 20+ years has been an enlightening, occasionally frustrating, yet a very rewarding journey. The stories are plentiful and the photos can range from shocking to hilarious. Through it all, some lessons seem to surface to the top of the list over and over. Here are my top ten list:

1: A House is Guilty until Proven Innocent: This slogan has been adopted by all the AJF Engineering inspectors. It does not mean that the inspector will be nitpicky, or call out issues that are insignificant. It simply means that systems and components that are included in the in the scope of the inspection are not functional until the inspector can verify that they are functional. For example, hot water is not available at the shower until the inspector can verify there is hot water: the A/C is not producing cold air until the inspector proves otherwise: the dishwasher is leaking until the inspector verifies it is not. The slogan prevents the inspector from becoming complacent or making assumptions about the condition of the home, particularly when the home is a cream-puff that may have lurking issues that could be missed if the inspector lets his guard down.

2: Follow the Process: A professional, experienced home inspector has a process for inspecting. This process is essential for accurate and detailed note taking to avoid missing something. How well an inspector is trained, by whom, and how they adhere to the process in any type or size of property does determine the quality of the inspection.

3: Make them Smile: The saying “people need to know and like you, then they’ll trust you” is very true is the home inspection world. Both REALTORS and clients need to feel comfortable with the home inspector. Our inspectors are counseled on the importance of putting everyone at ease from the get-go. An inspector who shows enthusiasm and passion for his craft will leave a positive impression on the client and REALTOR.

4: Common Issues Found: There are multiple issues that are commonly found on approximately 9 out of 10 home inspections. So why not get them checked out prior to the inspection? Some examples: range without anti-tip bracket,

dishwasher that doesn’t have the hi-loop on the drain pipe, Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter’s (GFCI’s) that are not working, and hose bib without an anti-siphon device. Having sellers take care of items prior to the inspections will show a high standard of care and increase the prospective buyer’s confidence in the home.

5: Communication is King: Keeping communication clear, simple and in layman terms helps to properly convey information about the property. It is important to express the condition of each system using facts, so as to avoid complications and misinterpretation. The inspector should not stray into offering opinions about the scope of the inspection or the inspector’s expertise.

6: Setting Expectations: Arizona Home Inspectors are certified by the Arizona Board of Technical Registration and follow their Professional Standards of Practice (adopted from ASHI). Clear communication regarding the scope of an inspection under the professional standards helps set the expectations for the clients and their agents as to what will and will not be included in the inspection. It mitigates problems and liability later on.

7: Perception is Reality: We all live by the client’s reality... In the transaction, it does not matter who is right or wrong when issues arise. The client’s perception is the only reality that you are working under, In other words; the customer is always right.

8: Attitude is Everything: Many challenges can arise during the inspection portion of the inspection process. A few examples include: heat, as in 110 degrees & above in homes and attics, utilities not on and access not available at the specified time. Regardless of the challenge, a home inspector must be ready with a positive, helpful attitude through it all.

9: Patience: It is truly a virtue. For most, purchasing a home is highly emotional. It is essential to be the voice of calm and reason throughout the process not matter what all other parties in the transaction are saying or doing. Thus, Home Inspectors have to handle all types of people and a wide variety of situations.

10: Can’t Judge a Book by Its Cover: the house looks immaculate and well cared for, but is it? Maybe the client thinks they don’t need an inspection because it looks so clean. The inspector ventures the attic and discovers no insulation or worse: all the electrical wires have been cut, plumbing pipes removed, heat pump missing and more. This has happened more than once with REO’s. Or the reverse happens, the house is a mess, there is a lot of clutter and is difficult to visualize any positive potential aspects of the home. However, the inspector determines the home is solid block wall construction, and has a new heat pump and roof. With some major cleanup and cosmetic remodeling, the house is well built and worth the investment.

In summary, a house has to plead its case. We must go into each property with our eyes wide open. We keep learning every day as we constantly adjust to real estate market

trends. As home inspectors, our ongoing goals are to educate and disclose the conditions of the property, while assisting in a smooth real estate transaction. Keeping us all innocent!

Sharon Wolf-Furman is the Co-owner of AJF Engineering. AJF Engineering, a home, termite and commercial inspection company, has completed over 33,000 inspections in Arizona since 1996. Sharon can be contacted at 480-661-8888 or www.ajfengineering.com.