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The Turnaround

A fresh pair of eyes from an experienced insider can help you see your way forward.

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Having a mentor is one of the best learning methods. Recently, I had the opportunity to have a knowledgeable insider view my business and suggest changes that would lead to the longevity and prosperity of my company. Morey Construction is a 23-year-old design/build firm about to go into its second generation with my two sons eventually taking over. This was part of the reason we were selected earlier this year by CNN's mentoring business show *The TurnAround*. The show pairs a small company with a successful executive from a large company in the same industry. The mentor — who is unknown to the small company until taping begins — is shown the financials of the company he or she will mentor as well as a 30-minute film of the owner recorded by CNN before the show's taping.

I was privileged to spend two-and-a-half days with Bruce Karatz, chairman and CEO of KB Home. Over the past 30 years, he has demonstrated integrity and vision in a company that has led the home building industry in workforce innovation and return on investment.

Bruce began by meeting each staff member — with the cameras rolling. Then, over the next two days, we toured one of our jobsites in production and a completed project. We also did an interview with one of our clients, who spoke about how and why she had selected Morey Construction and how the remodeling process had gone.



My one concern about participating in *The TurnAround* was that the mentor might merely want to sharpen his or her own image, but Bruce truly wanted to help. After our first meeting, he called his marketing staff and said, “Get ready to work late. I want to put some new logo ideas together for this company, and I need them first thing tomorrow morning.” This is just one of the things he helped us with.

Bruce also suggested removing material samples from our showroom and bringing them out during the selections process. He suggested hanging large before and after pictures in the showroom to allow prospective clients to see what our company does on a grand scale, instead of just looking at the material selections necessary for their project.

Taping the show took a lot of effort from my staff. They worked around the TV crew, kept our clients' work progressing, and supported things we were asked to do for the show. Each day we were given “homework” due the next day — enlarge pictures for the showroom, change our mailing form, modify survey questions. It brought us together as a team in ways that went beyond what we were doing before the show.

Some of Bruce's input was off-camera. He suggested that I get out of doing the design work and hire someone else to work with clients. This was something I had thought about, but he gave me the incentive to move forward. We have since hired an architect to direct the design department. This allows me time to focus on managing the company.

The uniqueness of stepping outside the business and looking at it through the eyes of such an experienced person helped reinforce the importance of continuing to make changes to improve the way our company interacts with clients and to look more closely at where we are headed.

The mentoring process also helped me recognize the importance of giving back to our industry and helping it gain the level of respect that it deserves. The process doesn't have to be recorded by a TV crew to be worthwhile. Every remodeling business owner should find an opportunity to have another business owner look over his or her shoulder — and be open to suggestions. As King Solomon said: “A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain to wise counsels.” - *Ben Morey is a design/build remodeler in Signal Hill, Calif.*