

# The Cheating Frame of Mind

*HOW TO CHEAT AT HOME REPAIR* IS ALL ABOUT ACHIEVING A PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE WITH YOUR POSSESSIONS. YOU WANT A HOME ENVIRONMENT YOU CAN BE PROUD OF—WHERE EVERYTHING LOOKS GOOD AND FUNCTIONS WELL. BUT MODERN LIFE IS ALREADY INSANELY STRESSFUL, AND YOU'D RATHER NOT WORK TOO HARD TO REACH A GOAL LIKE THAT. NO PROBLEM. WHEN YOU APPROACH HOME REPAIR ISSUES WITH THE RIGHT FRAME OF MIND, YOU CAN REDUCE STRESS, SAVE TIME, AND SAVE MONEY, TOO—ALL WHILE GETTING YOUR HOME REPAIR ISSUES PROPERLY ADDRESSED. LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT SOME CORE CHEAT-AT-HOME-REPAIR PRINCIPLES THAT WILL HELP.

## When Something “Breaks,” Resist the GULP Response

It’s peculiar how we can leap to conclusions. When something you own doesn’t perform as you expected, you may find yourself immediately assuming the worst—that a complex, expensive repair is in your immediate future. This is what psychologists call the GULP response, which stands for Giving Up Logic Prematurely. (OK, they *might* have called it that if they had a little less dignity.) Instead of GULPing, condition yourself to troubleshoot the situation. When you troubleshoot, you start by thinking about the symptoms of the object that’s not working. Then you methodically check all the simplest, most direct possible reasons for those symptoms. And only when you have eliminated the simplest reasons for the breakdown do you move on to more complicated causes.

To illustrate, let’s walk through an exaggerated example: You turn on a lamp’s switch but you get no light. Do you immediately declare that the lamp’s switch is broken or that the lamp’s wiring has shorted out? No, that would be GULPing. If the lamp has been in perfect working order up to now, those reasons are not very likely. But you do know that lamp cords often get pulled out of their outlets, so you would check that first. If that’s not the problem, you would check whether the outlet is supplying electricity (perhaps a circuit breaker tripped), so you plug a different appliance into the outlet to test it. If the outlet is not the culprit, there’s yet another common cause—a blown light bulb—so you would check that. By this point in your troubleshooting, 99.9 percent of the time you will have solved the problem—in minimal time at no expense (except for a new bulb). Had you GULPed, you would be halfway to the home center to hand over big bucks for a new lamp.

Sure, in real life maybe you would have figured out the lamp’s problem immediately, but professional repair people will tell you that a shockingly high percentage of house calls are for problems

that are about that simple—a circuit breaker that wasn’t on, a cord that wasn’t plugged in, a filter that had gotten overloaded, or a reset button that was overlooked, for instance. GULPing is expensive, time-gobbling, stress-inducing, and embarrassing. A simple troubleshooting habit will save you time and again.

## Build a “Support Staff”

Here’s another situation where a panic response will lead to misery and unnecessary expense: the times when you need to call in a professional to perform repairs around the house. At a minimum, you want to have on hand the names and contact information for a handyman, a plumber, and an electrician—professionals whose backgrounds you’ve already checked. If you just flip open the telephone book and pick the first name that sounds professional—or the first company with an impressive display ad—you’re in deep trouble. Your odds of getting good work at a reasonable price that way are very low. When you do your research and find repair professionals that you’re comfortable with, it’s wise to treat them like family, pay them fairly, and pay them promptly. For more on hiring professional help, see chapter 13.

## Know Your Limits— and Don’t Be Ashamed of Them

As long as you’re going to have a reliable “support staff,” you might as well make sensible use of them. As in an office environment, you need to know how to delegate—let the professionals available to you do what they do best, while you handle the work that you do best. Much of *How to Cheat at Home Repair* is devoted to simple fixes that any of us regular Janes and Joes can make with common tools and no special training. Pass the tough tasks to the pros without hesitation or a guilty thought. Sure, you might have a shred of admiration for the neighbor who has a basement packed wall-to-

wall with sophisticated tools and can add a new floor to his house single-handedly. But that's not you. You have your own priorities and will still manage to keep your home in great repair—in less time, for less cost, and with less chance of getting shoddy results. Remember these two acronyms:

- ◆ If a repair is a **Super-Easy Lightweight Fix (SELF)**, you get the job.
- ◆ If the work is **Hard, Important, Rarely done, and Elaborate (HIRE)**, pass it along to a professional.

## Be Methodical about Your Home and Possessions

I probably don't have to persuade you that your car needs regular inspections, oil changes, tire rotation, and such. The same is true of many parts of your home as well. I'm not trying to turn you into a clerk with a clipboard forever tucked under your arm, but neglecting your home invites breakdowns and wear and tear—which is actually the more expensive and angst-ridden path in life. Here are some approaches that will help:

- ◆ **Keep your owner's manuals in a predictable place.** You might want to store the owner's manual for your DVD player on the shelf of your entertainment center. If you're not going to stash a manual near the item it covers, keep it in the same place with all your other manuals—perhaps in a file or box in your office. That way, you'll never be at a loss when you need to do simple troubleshooting.
- ◆ **And speaking of manuals . . . if you're the “I never read owner's manuals” kind of consumer, get over it.** Most manuals are quick reads, and all sorts of crucial information is lurking in there.
- ◆ **Enter regular maintenance duties into your family calendar or computerized calendar.** Don't try to keep all your home's recurring maintenance issues in your head—months and years can slip by before you're

surprised by a breakdown. This includes yearly servicing of your furnace, changing of smoke detector batteries, and the like.

- ◆ **Pick a spot in your home to be Tool Central—a depot where you will store all the most basic home repair tools, arranged in a way that makes any item easy to find.**
- ◆ **Practice your MBO.** No, you office geeks, I'm not talking about Management By Objective. This stands for Maintenance by Observation. In several different parts of this book you will find mention of signs of trouble to watch out for. Just keep your eyes open—you couldn't ask for an easier task!
- ◆ **Follow the Materials on a Program (MOP) philosophy.** This means learning about an advantageous, low-maintenance material or tool—but not feeling like you need to buy it just yet. For instance, perhaps you're infatuated with the plastic-and-wood decking that hit the market in recent years. But your current deck has a good three years of life in it. So study up on the new material, price it, talk to neighbors who use it, and set aside some cash in a future budget. Just don't build the new deck until the old one is kaput.

## Don't Rush an Unfamiliar Repair Job

When you're making a new kind of repair—even a simple one—relax and don't commit yourself to a tight schedule for getting it done. Look at the task as a learning experience. Also, don't be astonished or frustrated if you end up taking more than one trip to the hardware store or the home improvement store in the course of the project.

## Embrace Innovative Products

Sure, you're assaulted by hundreds of advertising messages a day about new “miracle” products. But now and then a truly innovative product—perhaps a building material, perhaps a tool, or perhaps a

pest control device—will emerge that will truly save you time, effort, and money. Some good ones are mentioned in this book, and you will discover others on your own. As with any hype aimed at consumers, engage your B.S. detector and then make your own decision.