



Awash with knowledge in remodeling

By Max Zimbert, Staff Writer

Article Launched: 09/21/2008 06:26:07 PM PDT



Matt Plaskoff owns and operates One Week Bath design and remodeling based in Gardena. The business also has a training program for potential employees. (Robert Casillas/Staff Photographer)

Engineering, literature and history degrees are common at colleges and universities, but course catalogs are usually thin on bathroom construction and design.

Not at One Week Bath University.

The school is part of One Week Bath Inc., a Gardena custom bathroom remodeler that teaches would-be employees the tricks to speedy bathroom remodeling.

"It's not just how to sweat a pipe," founder and

CEO Matt Plaskoff, 46, said. "It's a step-by-step process of how to build a bathroom."

The school offers free training in construction and design that is more structured than the typical learn-as-you-go method that many home-remodeling workers depend on when starting out.

One Week Bath emphasizes training and discipline to prevent construction delays and going over budget.

For example, **contractors** sometimes begin remodeling before all materials are ready, or make last-minute costly changes to construction plans. One Week Bath waits for all parts to arrive at its warehouse before construction begins, and its method for one-week remodeling has been tested on more than 700 bathrooms.

One Week Bath attracts students with experience in the field as independent contractors who are looking for more consistent work, but "need to learn our way," Plaskoff said.

The education program is a useful retention tool for the company in an industry in which employees often come and go, he said.

"What I try to do is find those guys who love to build, who enjoy the process, but don't want to chase it and do payroll," Plaskoff said.

School lasts three weeks, and sessions begin when the company wants to add another construction crew. A class has about 15 students,

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and four or five typically graduate and are employed, Plaskoff said.

In order to be hired, students have to build a bathroom in one week as their final exam.

"It's the last thing they have to do to graduate," Plaskoff said.

More than half of Plaskoff's students will not make it to the final exam. They will have dropped out or decided bathroom remodeling was not for them, he said.

One Week Bath University always begins with an assessment.

"Everybody (who attends) says they know how to do this," Plaskoff said. "But we have to find out how many can do what they say they do."

Students learn timeliness and technique during the second week.

In the third week, students go into the field to observe. There are usually six students left before the final exam, Plaskoff said.

At test time, "We give them all the product and a file, as if it were a customer," Plaskoff said. "We give them envelopes during the week as a kind of challenge, like a customer who wants to move something, as a way of simulating reality."

Construction begins on a roofed stage outside the One Week Bath warehouse. On the final day, Plaskoff inspects and critiques the finished

bathroom.

"I'll ask, 'Who laid this tile?'" Plaskoff said. "We're picky."

There is another track for salespeople who do initial design work for One Week Bath. They create a kit of sales tools and product samples and are trained on the company's **software**. Students in the last stage ride along and observe Plaskoff while he sells and designs bathrooms with customers.

Student designers have to sell Plaskoff a bathroom for their final exam.

"They have to design it with their tools," he said. "They take measurements and put it in the **system** and come up with a price. I'll push back sometimes - 'Do you really think that goes with that?' - to see if they roll over."

The university's design program is more flexible because it "is less skill-based," Plaskoff said. A candidate can continue to observe and assist a designer.

"It's usually two or three weeks before they can go out on their own," Plaskoff said.

Designers are trained on software developed by the company, which is a key part of One Week Bath's success, Plaskoff said.

The software is connected with online catalogs that give designers the ability to determine price with a few clicks. The designer can print from the

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client's home every shade, shape and item the customer selects.

"We come to you and design the bathroom with you over three hours at your kitchen table," Plaskoff said. "If you like the price, I can print off a contract."

Plaskoff comes from a family of educators. His father is a college professor and his brothers are educators, as well.

"I have this love for teaching, and I'm applying it to an industry that historically invests very little in training," he said.

The company limits itself to remodeling bathrooms despite consistent requests for kitchen jobs. Plaskoff said such an expansion of the company's scope could dilute One Week Bath's expertise in bathroom construction.

"Because we only do bathrooms, we know exactly what it's going to cost," he said. "There aren't many bathrooms we haven't seen, so it's easy for us to give you a price."

The company is on the verge of adding another bathroom construction crew, Plaskoff said. The company has contacted a Los Angeles-area veterans organization, New Directions, to encourage veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan to enroll at One Week Bath University.

"We are working with an organization to find the right type of people with the right skill set,"

Plaskoff said. "We are looking at a veterans home too where they can learn to build a bathroom."

The company takes clients from Los Angeles, Ventura and Orange counties, and has been called for jobs in San Francisco. No job is too far if **travel expenses** are covered, Plaskoff said.

Customers with large bathrooms will call One Week Bath, even when the client's bathroom requires two weeks of construction because of its size, he said.

"We're called One Week Bath, but we should be One Week Bath and Beyond," Plaskoff said. "Customers don't care if it takes two weeks. They just don't want it to be eight-to-10 week bath."

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BUSINESS WATCH

Name: One Week Bath Inc.

Location: Gardena

Year founded: 1999

Employees: 31

Services: Custom bathroom remodeling

Executives: Matt Plaskoff, founder and CEO

Revenue: \$4 million last year.

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