

# Add Value to your Inspections

## Tips from One Inspector to Another

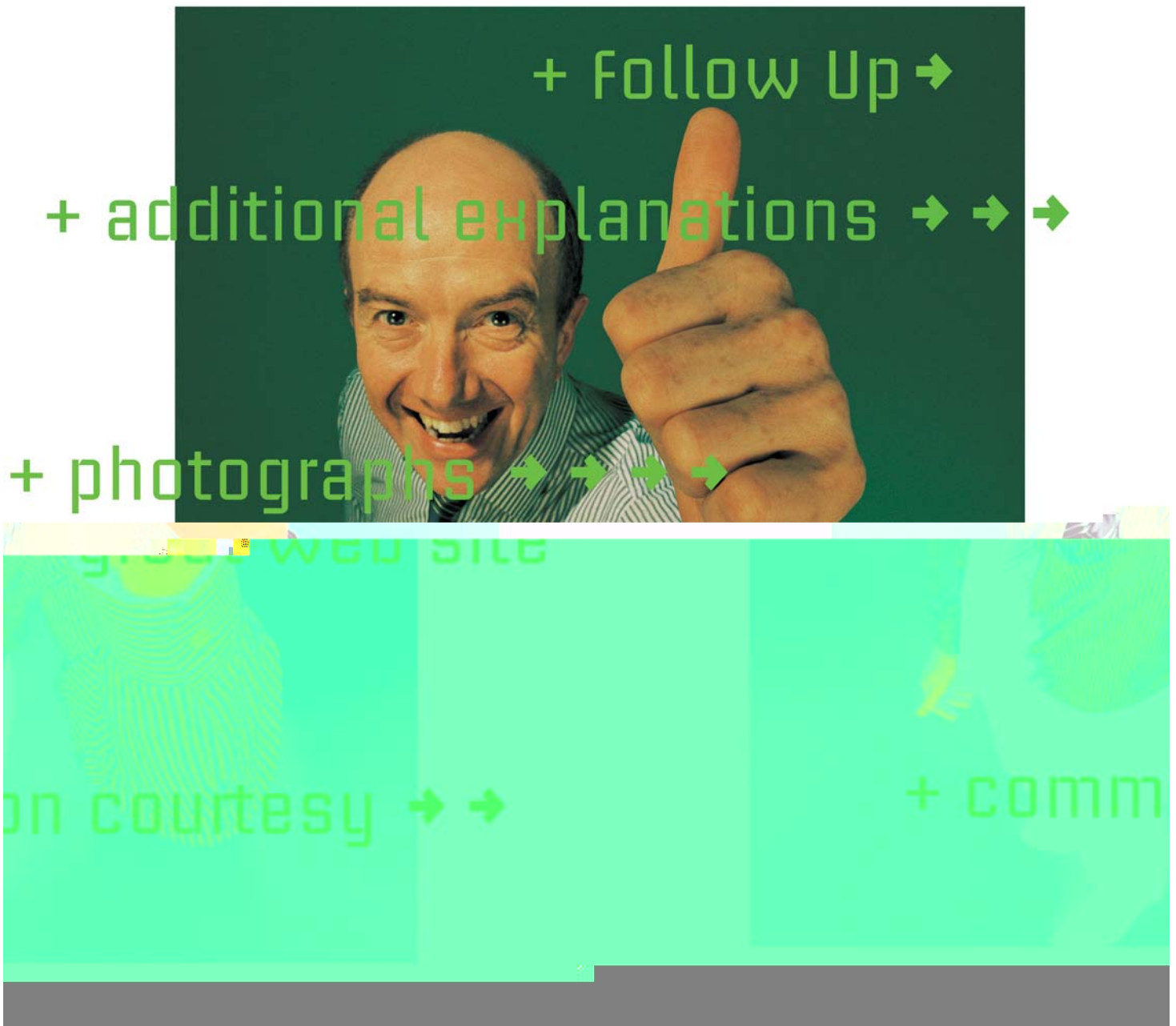
By Greg Peterson

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*I really love inspecting homes. I enjoy providing my comments and opinions to the prospective buyers—my clients. I can't imagine a more rewarding occupation. Invariably, I leave the inspection site with a feeling that I've helped someone, and the value of my assistance was well worth the inspection fee.*

It is important for the home inspection to be comprehensive, and based on a thorough knowledge of construction methods, types of materials, codes, manufacturer recommendations, conventional and unique installation methods, obsolete equipment and design, etc. But that's not enough. My clients are looking to me for more than that. A good home inspector makes the client feel like they've gotten more than just a report. You want your client to remember you and to understand why you charge the inspection fee you do. Here are ten tips for adding value to your inspections and differentiating yourself from the competition.

Just pointing out abnormalities is not enough; explain them. Make sure a clear explanation is given and ensure that not only a description of the problem is provided, but possible consequences and remedies are discussed. An example of how an inspector can elaborate on notations in the report to better serve his/her client could be something like an HVAC chase that is not properly fire-blocked. It's not enough to report, "No fire blocking for open duct chase in attic that leads to main floor air return intake." There may be a lot of statements in your report utilizing somewhat technical jargon that really tells a novice very little. In fact, some comments in your report might be interpreted as being beneficial, for instance, "bathtub drain incorporates a drum trap." The average homebuyer won't know if this is good or bad. In the first example, it would surely be advisable to explain to your clients what fire-blocking is and why it is an important safety related concern. Don't leave it at that, because generally an uninformed homebuyer is going to think, "Okay, I need to get this fixed and this will be expensive. Maybe I shouldn't buy the house." Actually, a 4x8 piece of sheetrock costing about eight bucks will do the trick, and any person able to use a utility knife and a hammer could probably perform the repair. Nearly every comment in the report needs some sort of elaboration, and it's important that the inspector provide sound, educated opinions and explanations that convey the total message, without needlessly scaring the clients into decades of apartment life.



**2.** Take pictures. I believe in the saying, “a picture is worth a thousand words.” Why spend twenty minutes of your valuable time trying to explain to your client what you saw in the attic. You might even try drawing a picture. I like taking photographs and I’ve found that my clients really like to see photographs. To make things easy, I display them one at a time at the end of the inspection on my laptop monitor screen while I explain the problem. If you haven’t gotten caught up with the latest techno gadgetry, then use old-fashioned film and mail the photos; at least they can be used during the purchase

transaction to help convey your findings to involved parties. I provide a CD with pictures to the client as part of the report at the end of the inspection.

**3.** Continue to follow up and answer questions throughout the purchase period. I tell my clients that they are welcome to use me as their personal consultant. If they have a problem come up in their home, totally unrelated to the home inspection I performed, and much later down the road, call me anyway and I’ll do what I can to provide my insight, or to help research a problem.

**4.** Offer supporting documentation to further explain and add credibility to findings in the report. I email applicable sections of ICC codes, manufacturer data, and references from other sources, when further explanation or credibility is necessary. Based on past inspections, and personal experience and education, I've also written an eighteen page "Home Care and Repair" manual that is included as part of every home inspection. By including this manual, I make sure that many things I mention in my report are already explained in depth in the Care and Repair section at the back of the inspection report.

**5.** Be mindful of the seller's property. I take my shoes off if in doubt about their condition, explain to the sellers what I will be doing, how long I will be in their home, and I leave a card in case they feel a need to contact me after the inspection.

**6.** Be Professional - Think of all the things that give meaning to the word professional. Things like credentials, demeanor, dress, punctuality, respect, etc. Even showing up with a full compliment of inspection tools and instruments suggests that you have invested in your trade and that you are ready to meet any challenge.

**7.** Build a good website. A great deal of information about you, about typical homeowner and homebuyer concerns, and about the services that you provide, can be concisely and interestingly presented on a well-developed website. This is another notch to be added to your belt that says, "professional".

**8.** Be creative. Think of something to provide your clients that other inspectors in the area don't provide. Often this can be done with little or no expense.

**9.** Show your clients that you do care about doing a good job. I send an electronic evaluation form that is extremely easy to fill out, which helps me identify areas where I need work, while demonstrating my desire to improve. Sending this form out a month or two after the inspection will help engrave your name in your client's memory, and be more likely to lead to future referrals.

**10.** Give them a list of common concerns. Many commonly found home inspection concerns can be explained very well with the use of one or two-page "handout" type documents; I print these out during the inspection if applicable. These short reference pages explain typical concerns that I know will come up fairly often, things like: mold, EIFS, wood stove installation, GFI protection, rot, termites, polybutylene, etc.

Occasionally, the thank-you I receive later is much more beneficial to me than the small fee I made from the inspection. I know every home inspector has experienced the goose bumps of fulfillment from a job-well-done more often than might be expected. No one can put a price tag on this kind of praise. I'm not so self-absorbed to believe these types of comments are unique to me personally; I'm well aware that feedback like this is inherent to our business. It's what we do. I surely don't have all the answers—I'm still learning myself. In order to stay competitive though, and in hopes of receiving one more encouraging thank you note, I continue to look for ways to improve upon what I do. 🏠

*Greg Peterson has been a residential home inspector for 6 years. He has a Bachelors degree in Engineering Technology, is ICC certified, is a member of the American Society of Home Inspectors and has over 25 years of experience in the construction field.*

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