

Lucy Taus Katz had two goals when she joined her husband, Joel, in his custom building business in 1994: handle customer service and client development. And she didn't lose a moment's sleep wondering where to start. "Customer service has to come first," she says. The Katzes believe that if you provide terrific service, the task of attracting new clients becomes far less difficult. ■ The couple

# Joel and Lucy Katz

begun by fine-tuning something they were already handling pretty well: the initial contact with their

clients. Joel Katz had developed a small pamphlet to help potential buyers get started. It suggested questions clients should ask when interviewing potential builders and architects. ■ The Katzes expanded that little list of questions into a 50-page booklet they call the "First Things First Workbook." The book takes the buyers step-by-step through the process of finding out what's important about any builder, architect, or other professional they are considering. ■ Once clients have a handle on hiring a professional team,

their next challenge is to make sense of the custom building process.

Again, the Katzes have done the legwork. They assembled a big binder,

the "Home Owner Organizer," that keeps every piece of information in

one place, from the contract and schedules to maps showing the location

and business hours of suppliers. And the most important part is

the section on status reports. The Katzes initiate at least one weekly

contact via fax or e-mail. They report on progress and glitches, and

assign that week's "homework" to the clients. They'll even loan the

client a fax machine, if necessary. They ask clients to print out the

reports and put them in the binder, and bring the binder to all meet-

ings. A big Katz Builders tote bag helps clients keep binder, product

samples, and vendor information all in one place. By organizing the

building process and clearly defining the client's job, the Katzes help

their clients participate. "It's their home, and they should be involved," says Lucy Katz. ■ And while the

Katzes build wonderful houses, that's not the unique product they sell. The most important thing they

build is a process—a process in which focused people, including the owners, build a house.—A.M.M.



Katz Builders, Austin, Texas  
Type of business: contractor  
Years in business: Joel, 17; Lucy, 5  
Employees: 5  
1998 volume: \$2.2 million  
1998 starts: 4 custom homes