

When the Storm Comes: A Builder's Guide to Thriving in the Age of Disaster

Andrew Kruger, CEO, BuildSOS Inc.

Acknowledgements

This book exists because of a group of people who saw a problem and refused to look the other way. They watched the same cycle repeat after every disaster: bad actors taking advantage, homeowners getting burned, and nothing changing. Instead of shaking their heads and moving on, they did something about it. They built BuildSOS. They gave years of their time, their money, and their energy to make it real. This section is for them.

Joe Mistich is the caffeine that runs the BuildSOS machine. He has more than 30 years of experience leading construction, infrastructure, and community development projects. As founder of Axcess Construction Management Services, Joe has guided a wide range of public and private initiatives. He was instrumental in the early formation of BuildSOS, designing and rolling out one of the first contractor ID card systems in 2007 to combat contractor fraud after disasters, and has since spend endless time, energy, and resources to make BuildSOS a success. A Tulane University and Louisiana State University graduate, Joe continues to bring energy, creativity, and strategic vision to the future of BuildSOS.

Billy Ward, Chairman of the Board, has been building homes and building this industry for more than forty years. He started as a first-class carpenter and went on to found Champion Builders LLC in Baton Rouge. Billy served as president of the Louisiana Home Builders Association, became a Senior Life Director of the National Association of Home Builders, and represented NAHB on the International Code Council's IRC Building Code Committee through multiple code cycles. He has helped shape the building codes that protect families across this country. His leadership, his craftsmanship,his hundreds of hours in meetings

on BuildSOS, and his stubborn belief that this industry can be better are the backbone of BuildSOS.

Ken Jones is a licensed architect, general contractor, and home builder with more than two decades of leadership in Louisiana's construction industry. A graduate of Louisiana State University, Ken has served for over twenty years on the Louisiana State Licensing Board for Contractors and holds an appointed seat on the Louisiana State Uniform Construction Code Council. He was inducted into the Louisiana Construction Hall of Fame for his contributions to the industry. At BuildSOS, Ken's architectural insight, regulatory expertise, and precision in drafting policies and navigating complex processes ensure that everything we do is built on a solid foundation.

Rob Hamilton is a licensed commercial and residential builder and the president of Rob Hamilton Construction, Inc., which he founded in 1998. Rob has served as Chairman of the Louisiana Home Builders Self-Insured Fund, Disaster Relief Fund, and Political Action Committee, and serves on the Board of the Louisiana Home Builders General Liability Trust. He was honored as Remodeler of the Year in 2012 and Builder of the Year in 2020 by the Louisiana Home Builders Association. Rob's practical experience, fiscal discipline, and deep industry relationships keep BuildSOS grounded and moving forward.

Charles "Chuck" Marceaux brings more than three decades of experience in licensing, compliance, and organizational leadership. He served as Executive Director of the Louisiana State Licensing Board for Contractors for over twelve years and as an Executive Officer and Board Member of the National Association of State Contractor Licensing Agencies. His career also includes service with the Central Intelligence Agency, the White House Travel Office, and the U.S. Army. Chuck's background in accountability and best practices across the construction industry gives BuildSOS a standard to live up to.

Michael LeCorgne is a veteran Risk Management Consultant with more than 38 years in the residential building industry. He holds multiple professional designations from NAHB, including Certified Graduate Associate, Certified Green Professional, Certified Sales Professional, and Certified Aging in Place Specialist. For over two decades, he has served as an approved instructor for the Louisiana State Licensing Board for Contractors and as a certified NAHB instructor. Michael has been honored as NAHB Associate of the Year, received the Bill Polley Award, and was inducted into both the St. Tammany and Louisiana Home Builders Halls of Fame. His lifelong commitment to education and professionalism is woven into everything BuildSOS teaches.

Mike Foley is a Founding Member of Contractor Integrity Systems LLC along with Joe, and has been on this journey with us from the beginning. He built the technical systems and structures that turned the BuildSOS vision into a working reality. He runs Digicomm, a tech company that creates enduring value-driven solutions for varied industries such as municipal court systems and large grocery store chains. Ideas are one thing. Making them function at scale is another. Mike made it work.

Randy Ward contributed endless enthusiasm, ideas, and critical feedback that shaped who BuildSOS has become. Every organization needs someone who pushes, questions, and cares enough to say what needs to be said. Randy is that person. He gets an idea and disappears for days before coming back with a prototype for a new solution for the company.

These are the people who made BuildSOS possible. They had the vision to see a need, the heart to care about it, and the persistence to put in years of time, money, and effort to see it through. This book is theirs as much as it is mine.

About BuildSOS

BuildSOS started in 2016 because a few builders saw something that frustrated them. They watched the cycle repeat: disaster hits, unethical contractors and other bad actors show up and take advantage, homeowners get ripped off, the industry's reputation gets worse, houses are rebuilt the same way, homeowners are no more prepared for the next disaster, and nothing seems to change. They decided to do something about it. They took ownership. They created BuildSOS to see what they could do to help.

That's the foundation. A group of builders who decided not to stand on the sidelines.

Since then, we've built a network of over 5,000 contractors who share that same commitment. We grew over 350% in 2025 with the message that you can build your business while you build your community and make it more resilient.

But BuildSOS knows that we get there faster together. We parter with organizations and experts who are doing real work in disaster preparedness and recovery. We work with core partners who share our mission and have their own networks of builders and professionals. We work with expert partners—architects, engineers, insurance specialists, restoration professionals—whose voices and knowledge matter. We work with product partners who are building tools and solutions that actually help contractors do better work. And we work with pilot partners who are testing new approaches and sharing what they learn. We bring all of this expertise into this handbook because they

understand the work. They've been in the field. They know what actually works.

This handbook is a reflection of what we've learned together, and we are learning more all the time. It's built on the experience of builders who've been through it, and the knowledge of experts who are committed to making things better. We're offering it to you not as a final word, but as a tool. As a way to help you do what you can. Because we are the builders that build our communities. That's not a slogan. That's the reality. When disaster hits, people don't call the government. They call contractors. They call builders. They call us. And what we do in those moments—how we show up, how we work, what we stand for—that shapes our communities.

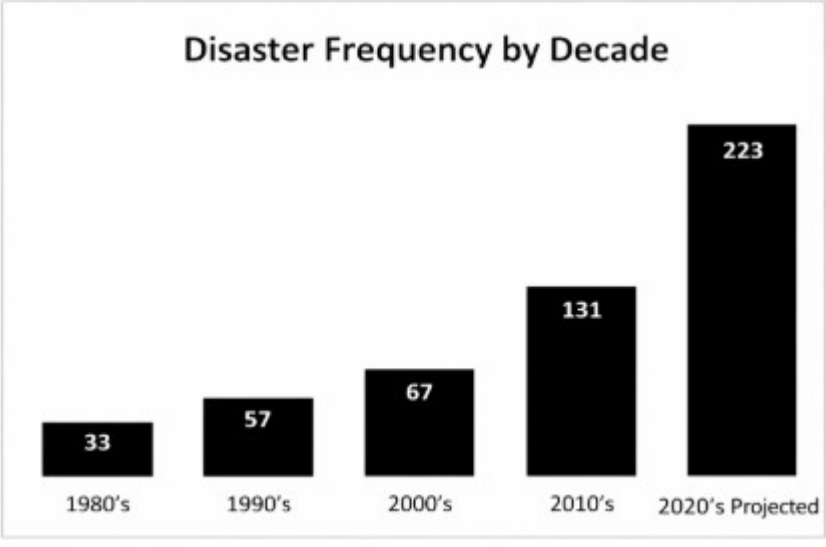
We hope this handbook empowers you to do what you can. To be the builder who shows up. To be the one who does it right. To be part of something bigger than yourself.



Introduction: The $182 Billion Wake-Up Call

There was a builder from Florida who, a few months after Hurricane Ian tore through his town, reflected on his thirty years in the business. "I've built hundreds of homes. I thought I'd seen it all. But watching the water rise, seeing roofs peel off houses I'd built with my own hands… it changes you. It's about people's lives."

His story isn't unique. In 2024 alone, the United States was hit with 27 billion-dollar disasters, racking up a staggering $182.7 billion in damages. [1] That's a wake-up call. The world is changing, the storms are getting stronger, and the way we build has to change with it. For builders and tradesmen, this presents the single biggest opportunity of our generation. Disaster frequency in the US has increased year over year, with the 2020's projected to be the worst decade yet.



For years, many of us in the construction industry have seen disaster prep as a niche market. But the data tells a different story. The disaster preparedness market is exploding, projected to nearly double in the next decade. [2] And here's the reality: disaster restoration work can be profitable. But I need to be clear about what that means.

Yes, there can be margins of 35-50% in disaster work, compared to the 10-20% we're used to in standard construction. [3] But those margins aren't about gouging people in their moment of crisis. They're about legitimate business value. When you show up with expertise, when you manage complex projects efficiently, when you deliver quality work under pressure, when you have the systems and integrity to do things right, that's worth more. That's not exploitation, but good business.

Here's what you need to understand: after every major disaster, there are contractors who show up for the wrong reasons. They're the storm chasers. They do shoddy work, they take advantage of desperate homeowners, and they disappear once the money is made. They leave behind ripped-off families, poorly constructed repairs, and a community full of people who've been burned and don't trust contractors anymore. They poison the entire market.

When those bad actors are gone, it's the good guys—the contractors embedded in the community, the ones with integrity—who have to clean up the mess they've left. You inherit their outcomes: homeowners who are suspicious, who've been taken

advantage of, who are afraid to trust anyone. You have to rebuild not just homes, but trust. And that's harder than building a house.

But here's the other side of it: if you're not there when your community needs you, you're letting everyone down. You're letting your community down. You're letting your own brand down. When you stand on the sidelines after a disaster, you're not just missing an opportunity for good work. You're abandoning the people who need help most. And you're allowing the predatory contractors to define what "builders" mean in your community. That has consequences that last for years.

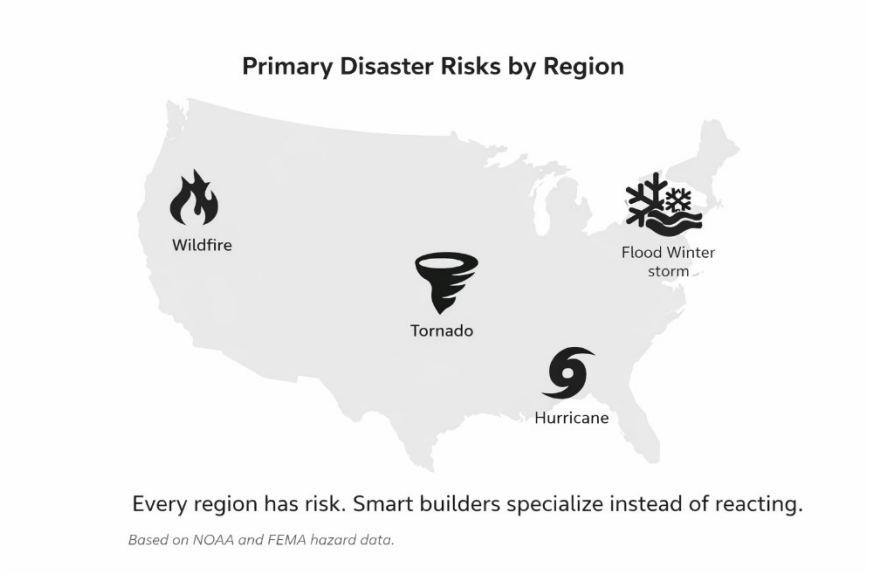
Disaster Work Opportunities

Phase	Typical Work	Margin Reality
Immediate Response	Tarps, debris, emergency repairs	Low margin, high chaos
Assessment & Documentation	Inspections, reports, scope definition	High leverage, low cost
Insurance Repair	Covered repairs, supplements	Moderate margin, admin-heavy
Mitigation & Upgrades	Code upgrades, resilience improvements	High margin, repeatable
Rebuild & Hardening	Full reconstruction	High revenue, high risk

The contractors who do this right—who show up, do quality work, treat people fairly, and embed themselves in their community—those are the ones who build lasting businesses. They become the go-to contractors for years. They get referrals.

They get repeat business. They forge relationships that extend far beyond a single disaster. That's worth infinitely more than any short-term margin play.

Depending on where you do business, the opportunities are different. You need to know, and be prepared for, the type of work that will bring you the most opportunities.



This work is about becoming the person your community turns to when things go wrong. It’s about building homes that stand strong when the wind howls. It’s about having the skills and the integrity to help people put their lives back together.

This work is about becoming the person your community turns to when things go wrong. It's about building homes that stand strong when the wind howls. It's about having the skills and the integrity to help people put their lives back together. It's about being the contractor who shows up, who does it right, and who stays.

This book was written because the builders and tradesmen on the ground are the key to a more resilient future. You already have the skills. You know how to build. This handbook is designed to help you apply those skills in a new way; to see the opportunity that's right in front of you. As the Buddhists say, there's a "diamond under your feet." It's time to recognize it.

This is a playbook, a guide to thriving in the age of disaster. We'll cover everything from building trust with clients in a crisis to navigating the insurance maze and leading your community's recovery. We'll look at the hard data and the human element, which is the part of the business that matters most.

What Has Changed for Builders

- ✓ Disasters are more frequent
- ✓ Insurance scrutiny is higher
- ✓ Homeowners are more stressed
- ✓ Documentation matters more than speed
- ✓ Reputation spreads faster than ever

Throughout this book, you'll find stories from the field. These aren’t about one single person; they are aggregate examples, highlighting the experiences we’ve heard from countless members of our industry. The names and details have been changed to protect privacy, but the lessons are real.

How to Use This Book

This handbook is designed to be both a comprehensive guide and a practical reference. You can read it cover to cover, or you can jump to the chapters that address your most pressing needs right now. Here's how to get the most out of it:

- **If you're new to disaster recovery work, start with Part I: Building on Solid Ground.** This section will help you establish the foundational elements of a resilient business: trust, integrity, team development, and leadership.

- **If you're looking to expand your disaster recovery business, focus on Part II: Understanding the Market.** These chapters will help you identify opportunities, specialize strategically, and position yourself as a regional expert.

- **If you're ready to execute and improve your operations, dive into Part III: Operational Excellence.** This section covers the practical aspects of managing disaster recovery projects from start to finish.

- **If you need quick answers or templates, go straight to the Appendices.** You'll find checklists, templates, sample documents, regional playbooks, and case studies that you can use immediately.

Throughout the book, you'll find:

- Visual frameworks that distill complex concepts into simple diagrams
- Real-world examples from builders who've been through disasters
- Actionable checklists you can implement right away
- End-of-chapter questions to help you reflect and apply what you've learned
- References to additional resources available at BuildSOS.com

This book is not meant to be read once and shelved. It's a working document. Mark it up. Dog-ear the pages. Use the checklists. Come back to it as your business grows and your needs change.

The Resilience Framework: How Everything Connects

The chapters in this book are organized around a simple framework that shows how all the pieces fit together to create a thriving disaster resilience business:

The Foundation (Part I: Building on Solid Ground)

- Trust (Chapter 1) is the currency of disaster work. Without it, nothing else matters.
- Integrity (Chapter 2) is what sustains trust over time. It's how you make money without losing your soul.
- Team (Chapter 3) is your capacity. A resilient business needs resilient people.
- Sustainability (Chapter 4) connects environmental responsibility to disaster resilience. They're not separate goals.
- Proactivity (Chapter 5) is about getting ahead of disasters, not just reacting to them.
- Advocacy (Chapter 6) positions you as a guide through the insurance maze, not just a contractor.
- Efficiency (Chapter 7) gives you the systems and tools to scale without burning out.

- Leadership (Chapter 8) is about stepping up in your community, not just running a business.

The Strategy (Part II: Understanding the Market)

- Market Opportunity (Chapter 9) helps you see the full scope of the resilience economy and find your niche.
- Regional Specialization (Chapter 10) shows you how to become the go-to expert in your area.
- Code Evolution (Chapter 11) keeps you ahead of the curve as standards change.

The Execution (Part III: Operational Excellence)

- Job Site Control (Chapter 12) is about managing the chaos of post-disaster work.
- Recovery Expertise (Chapter 13) covers the specialized skills that set disaster work apart.
- Client Empowerment (Chapter 14) turns satisfied customers into advocates for your business.
- Long-Term Vision (Chapter 15) ensures your business is sustainable for the long haul.

Each chapter builds on the previous ones, but they're also designed to stand alone. The framework shows you how

everything connects, but you can dive into any chapter based on where you are in your journey.

A Note on Margins and Ethics

Before we dive in, I want to address something directly. You'll notice that this book talks openly about profit margins, business growth, and financial success. Some people might find that uncomfortable in the context of disaster work. They might think that talking about making money from disasters is somehow unethical.

I disagree. Here's why.

Disaster recovery work is complex, high-risk, and requires specialized expertise. It demands long hours, quick mobilization, sophisticated project management, and the ability to work under extreme pressure. The contractors who do this work well deserve to be compensated fairly for the value they provide.

The problem isn't contractors making money from disaster work. The problem is contractors who exploit vulnerable people, do shoddy work, and disappear. The problem is the storm chasers who give the entire industry a bad name.

This book is about building a profitable business by doing things right. It's about creating value for your clients and your community while building a sustainable business for yourself and your team. Those two goals are not in conflict. In fact, they're inseparable.

The most successful disaster recovery contractors are the ones who combine business acumen with genuine care for their communities. They're the ones who show up, do excellent work, charge fair prices, and build relationships that last for decades. They're the ones who make their communities more resilient while building thriving businesses.

That's the kind of contractor this book is written for. That's the kind of contractor BuildSOS exists to support. And that's the kind of contractor the world needs more of.

So, let's get started. The next disaster is coming. It's time to get ready.





PART I: BUILDING ON SOLID GROUND

Before you can build a resilient house, you must build a resilient business. That starts with you. It starts with the foundation of your company: your reputation, your integrity, and your team. In this section, we'll look at how to work on yourself and your business, so you're ready for the opportunities ahead. Because if you want to get what's out there, you need to start in here.





Chapter 1: The Trust Economy

Why your reputation is worth more than your profit margin

A few years back, a tornado ripped through a small town in the Midwest. Two builders, let's call them John and Dave, went to work. Both were skilled, both were busy. But they took very different approaches.

Dave was all about volume. He'd sign a contract, get the work done as fast as possible, and move on to the next one. He didn't have time for follow-up calls or lengthy explanations. The work was done, the house was standing, and that was that.

John, on the other hand, took a different tack. He spent extra time with each homeowner, explaining the process. After each job, he'd schedule a follow-up call a month later, just to check in. He even organized a volunteer day with his crew to help clean up a local park that had been damaged.

Guess who's still the go-to builder in that town? It's John. Why? Because in the chaotic aftermath of a disaster, trust is the most valuable currency you have. The strength of the relationship is paramount. The market data backs this up: builders who build strong client trust during a crisis see 30% more referrals. [4]

John Has Dave Beat

	Dave	John
Job speed	Fast	Reasonable
Client communication	Minimal	Proactive
Follow-up	None	Scheduled
Community presence	None	Visible
Referrals after disaster	Low	High
Reputation over time	Fades	Dominates

This is about being smart. A little bit of follow-through goes a long way. That simple **post-rebuild follow-up** call John made? It told his clients he stands by his work. It turns a transaction into a relationship. And in this business, relationships are everything. Don't overthink it. Just put a reminder in your calendar to call a client a month after the job is done. Ask them how everything is holding up. That's it. You'll be amazed at the goodwill it generates.

In today's world, we can do even better than just a phone call. By **leveraging a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system**, you can automate and personalize your follow-ups. Look, I know 'CRM' sounds like corporate jargon, but hear me out. It's basically a digital Rolodex that remembers things you'd forget. Start simple: pick a system (there are free ones), and just use it to track when you last talked to a client. Set a reminder for six months out. That's it. You'll be amazed how much goodwill you build when you're the builder who actually remembers to check in.

Without a CRM vs With a CRM

Without	With
Forget to follow up	Automatic reminders
Generic sales pitches	Relevant check-ins
Missed referrals	Review requests sent
Lost opportunities	Targeted resilience upgrades

A CRM is just memory you don't have to manage.

A CRM can also help you with **data-driven upselling for resilience**. By tracking the work you've done for a client, you can identify opportunities to make their home even safer. Did you repair their roof after a hailstorm? A year later, your CRM could prompt you to send them an email offering a discount on impact-resistant windows. It's a targeted, relevant offer that provides real value. The key is to make it helpful, not salesy. Frame it as, "We were thinking of you and wanted to let you know about a new product that could save you money on your insurance."

And don't be shy about it. When you do good work, and it protects a family during a storm, ask them for a **testimonial**. Share that story on your website. There's no better marketing than a real person saying, "John built our house, and it made it through the storm." You can even use your CRM to automatically request reviews from satisfied customers. These reviews are gold, and they build trust with potential clients in a

way that no advertisement ever could. A word of caution: don't offer to pay for testimonials. It's unethical, and it will backfire.

As you build this base of happy clients, think about creating a **referral program that works**. Give people an incentive to recommend you rather than just hoping they will. A gift card, a discount on future work, a simple thank you note can go a long way in encouraging your best clients to become your most effective salespeople. The best referral programs are simple and easy to understand. Don't make people jump through hoops to get their reward.

Referral Programs That Work

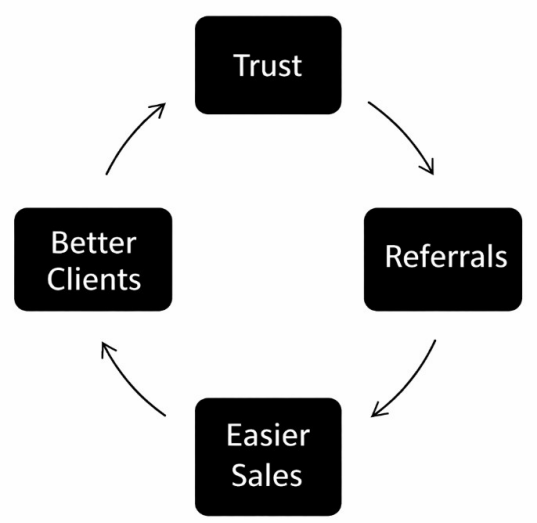
Incentive	Why It Works
Gift card	Immediate
Future discount	Relevant
Thank-you note	Memorable

If it needs explaining, it won't work.

Finally, remember what John did at the park. **Community volunteering** shows you're invested in your town. It builds goodwill. It makes you a leader. And when the next storm comes, people will remember the builder who was there for them, in more ways than one. Start small. Sponsor a local Little League team. Help at a community cleanup day. It doesn't have to be a huge commitment to make a big impact.

In the trust economy, your reputation is your most valuable asset. Protect it, nurture it, and it will pay you back tenfold.

How Trust Compounds After a Disaster



Builders who build trust during crises see 30% more referrals.

Trust also comes from the small, everyday interactions. It starts with the very **first phone call**. That initial conversation is your chance to set a professional tone, to listen more than you talk, and to ask the right questions to determine if a client is a good fit. It's a filtering mechanism that saves you from the headaches of difficult clients and unprofitable jobs.

A good first step is to create a simple checklist of questions to ask every new lead. It will keep you focused and ensure you don't forget anything important. A builder friend of mine who has been building for decades tells his clients, right at the beginning of the project, "there is never a stupid question that

you can ask me about the process." He finds this puts the client at ease and helps to build the relationship right from the outset.

Questions to Ask on Every First Call

- ☐ What happened?
- ☐ When did it happen?
- ☐ What worries you most right now?
- ☐ Have you talked to insurance yet?
- ☐ Timeline expectations?

Trust is also built through **proactive communication**. Don't wait for clients to call you with questions. Update them regularly, be honest about problems, and never let them hear bad news from someone else. Good times to update are project start, mid-job, immediate problem disclosure, completion thank you, follow up check in. A simple **"thank you"** can also go a long way in strengthening a relationship. It's a small gesture that shows you appreciate their business. A handwritten note is a nice touch that people remember.

The Simplest Trust System That Works



One Reminder. One Call. Long Memory.

And of course, trust is built on a foundation of transparency. **Educate your customers**. Explain the "why" behind your decisions. Use visuals to help them understand. The more they understand, the more they'll trust your expertise.

This includes **managing client expectations** from the very beginning. Be realistic about timelines, costs, and potential challenges. It's always better to under-promise and over-deliver. A common mistake is to be overly optimistic to try to win the job. It always comes back to bite you.

Even a simple **job sign** can build trust. It's a form of marketing, yes, but it also tells the neighborhood that you're a professional who is proud of your work. It shows you're not afraid to put your name on it. Make sure your sign is professional and includes your license number.

And what about when you encounter **difficult clients**? It's inevitable. The key is to handle these situations with professionalism and grace. Listen to their concerns, document everything, and know when to walk away.

Consider walking away when a client is consistently disrespectful to you or the crew, has unrealistic demands that cannot be changed with reason, or when they pressure you to cut corners. Sometimes, the most profitable job is the one you don't take. A good rule of thumb is that if a client is disrespectful to you or your team in the beginning, it's only going to get worse.

Trust Signals Homeowners Notice

- ☐ Follow-up calls
- ☐ Testimonials
- ☐ Reviews requested ethically
- ☐ Community involvement
- ☐ Professional job signage
- ☐ License number visible

Most builders skip these. That's why they work.





Chapter 1 Questions for You

Why your reputation is worth more than your profit margin

Who is one client you should follow up with this month?

What's one thing a past client complained about that you never want to happen again?

What's one way you could show a client you stand by your work?

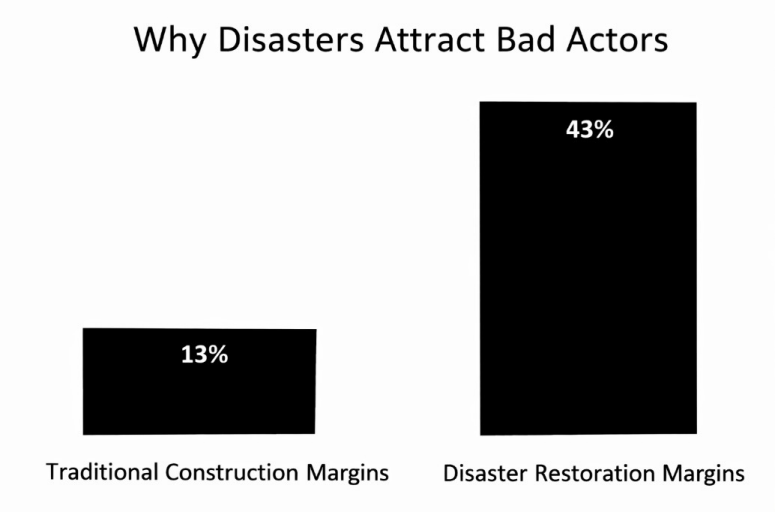
When will you do it?



Chapter 2: The Integrity Advantage

How to make money without losing your soul

Let's be honest. When a disaster hits, there's a lot of money to be made. The disaster restoration industry boasts profit margins of 35-50%, a number that makes most traditional construction work look like a charity case. [3] And when that kind of money is floating around, it can be tempting to cut corners, to pad the bill, to take advantage of people who are desperate and scared.



High margins create opportunity. They also attract abuse.

It happens. After a big hurricane, there was a "builder" from out of state who rolled into town with a fancy truck and a slick sales pitch. He was charging double the going rate for roof repairs, and he was demanding cash up front. He pressured the desperate people who were at their lowest point, and promised the world. He would take care of them, he would handle it. He did shoddy work, and by the time the homeowners realized it, he was long gone, and there was no money left to do the repairs that were needed.

That's a betrayal. And in the long run, it's a losing strategy. The builders who last, the ones who build real, sustainable businesses, are the ones who operate with integrity. They understand that a good reputation is worth more than a quick buck.

Spot the Builder Who Won't Be Here Tomorrow

Storm Chaser Signs	Professional Builder Signs
Out-of-state plates	Local address
Cash up front	Milestone payments
Double market pricing	Transparent estimate
High pressure	Time to decide
No permits	Permits pulled

If you wouldn't hire them, don't be them.

It starts with the "**understanding" estimate**. This goes beyond a list of line items and costs. It's a conversation. It's about sitting down with the homeowner, listening to their story, and understanding their fears and their priorities. It's about building trust from day one by showing them that you see them as a person rather than a project. A good first step is to start the conversation by asking, "How are you doing?" before you even look at the damage.

What an Honest Estimate Actually Includes

1. Ask "How are you doing?"
2. Listen to priorities
3. Explain scope and limits
4. Review costs
5. Confirm understanding

This commitment to transparency should continue throughout the project. Provide **daily project updates**. A quick email at the end of the day, a few photos sent via text. These simple things can make a huge difference. They keep the client in the loop, they manage expectations, and they prevent small misunderstandings from becoming big problems. The key is to be consistent. If you say you're going to update them daily, do it.

The 2-Minute Daily Update

- ☐ What we did today
- ☐ What happens tomorrow
- ☐ Any issues or delays
- ☐ One photo

Consistency builds confidence.

Of course, even with the best communication, there will be **difficult conversations**. A material is delayed, an unexpected problem arises, a change order is needed. The key is to handle these conversations with grace. Be honest, be direct, and be prepared to listen. A little bit of empathy can go a long way in de-escalating a tense situation. Never deliver bad news via text or email. It's a conversation that deserves the respect of a phone call.

And above all, **avoid overpromising**. In a post-disaster situation, there are a million things that can go wrong. Be realistic with your clients. It's always better to underpromise and overdeliver than the other way around. A little bit of honesty upfront can save you a world of headaches down the road. A good way to do

this is to build a buffer into your timeline. If you think a job will take four weeks, tell the client it will take five.

Why Underpromising Wins

Overpromise Timeline	Honest Timeline
4 weeks promised	5 weeks promised
Delay happens	Buffer absorbs delay
Client upset	Client calm
Trust lost	Trust maintained

Buffers protect relationships.

This also means **following local laws**. It's shocking how many builders try to skirt the rules, especially in the chaos after a storm. But getting the right permits, following the updated building codes. These things are about safety and quality. They also protect you from liability. Make it a point to know your local building inspector and to have a good working relationship with them.

Integrity Basics That Protect You

☐ Permits pulled
☐ Local codes followed
☐ Inspections passed
☐ Inspector relationship maintained

Shortcuts cost more later.

Finally, the project isn't over when the last nail is hammered. The **post-project walkthrough** is your final opportunity to ensure lasting satisfaction. Walk the property with the homeowner. Answer their questions. Address their concerns. Make sure they are 100% happy with the work before you pack up your tools. This is also a great time to ask for a testimonial.

End Every Job With This

- ☐ Permits pulled
- ☐ Local codes followed
- ☐ Inspections passed
- ☐ Inspector relationship maintained

Jobs end. Reputations continue.

Look, I'm not saying you shouldn't make a good living. You absolutely should. **But you can make a great living without compromising your integrity.** In fact, in the long run, it's the only way. The trust you build by being honest, transparent, and reliable is the foundation of a business that will last for decades, long after the storm chasers have packed up and moved on.

Integrity is also about the promises you make, both spoken and unspoken. It's about having a solid **contract** that protects both you and your client. Never, ever start work without a signed contract. It's your most important business document. And make sure you **read your contracts** carefully. Understand what you're agreeing to before you sign on the dotted line. If you don't understand something, ask a legal professional. It's a small investment that can save you a fortune.

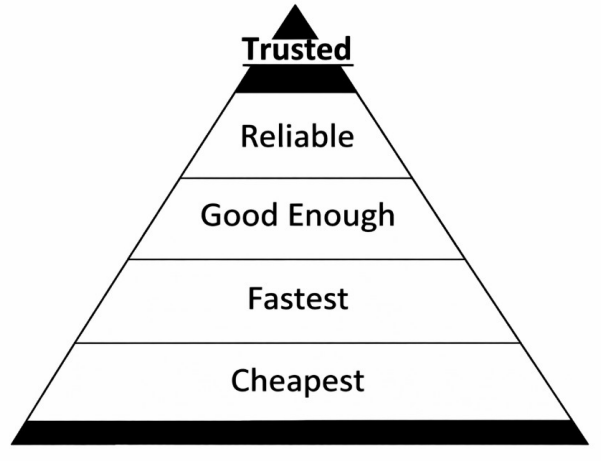
And if you want a reference for what 'good work' actually means, get yourself a copy of the NAHB's Residential Construction Performance Guidelines, Sixth Edition. It defines acceptable performance for every component of a home, from foundation to roof. It's the same guide used to settle warranty disputes. Having it on your shelf, and being able to point to it when a client asks 'is this right?', tells them you hold yourself to a published standard.

Sometimes, the most ethical decision is to say “no.” The **value of ‘no’** is a lesson that many builders learn the hard way. Turning down a job that isn’t a good fit, or a client who raises red flags, is a sign of a confident, mature business. It’s better to have no work than to have a job that will be a nightmare.

Is the client disrespectful to you or your team? **Walk away**. Are the expectations for the job unrealistic or unachievable? **Say no**. Is the client asking you to not follow proper procedures? **Decline the job**. Are there clear signs the client can’t or won’t pay? **Walk away**. Does your gut tell you something is not right? Consider whether it is worth it taking the job. It's better to have no work than to have a job that will be a nightmare.

This is especially true when it comes to price. Don’t be the builder with the **cheapest price**. Competing on price alone is a race to the bottom. Instead, compete on quality, on service, on integrity. The clients you want are the ones who are willing to pay for that. A good way to frame this is to say, “We may not be the cheapest, but we’re the best. And here’s why.”

How Professionals Compete Without Racing to the Bottom



The best clients don't shop the bottom rung.

And when you do a job, stand behind it. Offer a **warranty** that shows you believe in the quality of your work. It's a powerful statement of confidence. A one-year warranty on your workmanship is a good place to start.

Integrity also means being smart about how you manage your projects. If a homeowner wants to supply their own materials, be wary. **Homeowner-supplied materials** can create a host of problems. If you must accept them, document everything in writing. Make it clear that you are not responsible for the quality or performance of the materials.

And if you see a problem, address it. The **cost of doing nothing** is almost always higher than the cost of fixing a problem right

away. Whether it’s a small leak or a major structural issue, ignoring it will only make it worse. A good rule of thumb is to address any problem within 24 hours.

Finally, make sure you have a formal process for closing out a project. A **certificate of completion** is a simple document that can save you from a world of headaches. It’s a clear, written record that the job is done and the client is satisfied. Have the client sign it before you accept the final payment.

This also means **following local laws**. It's shocking how many builders try to skirt the rules, especially in the chaos after a storm. But getting the right permits, following the updated building codes. These things are about safety and quality. They also protect you from liability. Make it a point to know your local building inspector and to have a good working relationship with them.

Integrity Basics That Protect You

- ☐ Permits pulled
- ☐ Local codes followed
- ☐ Inspections passed
- ☐ Inspector relationship maintained

Shortcuts cost more later.





Chapter 2 Questions for You
How to make money without losing your soul

What's one corner you're tempted to cut? (Be honest.)

What would it cost you if that corner-cutting came back to bite you?

What's one thing you need to do differently on your next job?

What's stopping you from doing it?



Chapter 3: Building a Resilient Team

Developing your team's resilience

There was once a framing crew that was a well-oiled machine. They were fast, they were efficient, and they did beautiful work. But when a major flood hit their area, they were lost. They didn't know how to deal with water damage, with mold, with the unique challenges of a post-disaster job site. They were great at building new houses, but they were completely unprepared for rebuilding broken ones.

That's the reality for a lot of crews in our industry. We train them to build without training them to rebuild. And in an age of increasing disasters, that's a huge gap. The market is demanding a new kind of construction worker, one who is a recovery expert.

This is a massive opportunity. The builders who invest in **workforce development**, who build teams that are as resilient as the homes they construct, are the ones who are going to own the future of this industry. If your team is already in place, you can train them with the techniques in this book and on BuildSOS.com. This doesn't have to be overwhelming – it is a series of small practices that add up to a big difference.

It starts with **recruiting for resilience**. You're looking for someone who can stay calm under pressure, beyond just swinging a hammer, who can solve problems on the fly, and who has a deep sense of empathy. These are the soft skills that are essential in a post-disaster environment. A good way to screen for these skills is to ask behavioral questions in the interview, like, “Tell me about a time you had to deal with a difficult customer.”

What to Screen for in Post Disaster Resilience

Skill	Interview Question
Calm under pressure	“Tell me about a time everything went wrong.”
Problem solving	“What did you fix on the fly?”
Empathy	“How did the customer react?”
Accountability	“What would you do differently?”

Once you have the right people, you need to get them up to speed quickly. This is where **AI-powered onboarding** can be a game-changer. Imagine an onboarding process that is personalized to each employee, that uses virtual reality to simulate a post-disaster job site, and that provides real-time feedback and coaching.

The AI tools make this easy in that they can take your employee’s profile and match it to the needs on the jobsite for their role. It’s a faster, more effective way to train your team. If that sounds too futuristic, start with something simple. Create a library of training videos that your new hires can watch on their

own time – or better yet, use the ones on the BuildSOS.com website or YouTube channel.

Organizations with structured onboarding improve new hire retention by over 80% and productivity by more than 70%.

Source: SHRM.

And as your team grows, think about the **future of the jobsite**. We're already seeing the integration of **robotics** for tasks like demolition and material handling. These technologies can improve safety, increase efficiency, and free up your human workers to focus on the more skilled aspects of the job. You don't have to be a tech genius to get started. There are companies that will lease you a robot for a specific job.

Automation and robotics can reduce jobsite injuries by 30–50% in high-risk tasks like demolition and material handling.

Source: OSHA, McKinsey construction technology reports.

Workforce development isn't just about training, yes, but it's also about creating a culture of excellence. It's about recognizing that **your team is your greatest asset**.

Your **first hire** is one of the most important decisions you'll ever make. And as you grow, you'll need to learn how to delegate. A good **project manager** can be worth their weight in gold. Look for someone who is organized, a good communicator, and who you can trust to represent your company. They will support you in building out the culture you envision. But if they are pulling in another direction, you've just made your job harder.

Studies show that up to 85% of job success is driven by soft skills like communication, adaptability, and emotional intelligence.

Source: Harvard, Carnegie Foundation, Stanford synthesis.

And don't forget about your **subcontractors**, your skilled professional colleagues. We all know that without them, your business shuts down. They are an extension of your team, and you need to choose them carefully and manage them closely. Their work reflects on you. Have a standard subcontractor agreement that you use with everyone. It will save you a lot of headaches.

What Future Proof Builders Invest In

☐ A Workplace with Strong Values, Work Ethic
☐ People with Adaptable Skills and Personalities
☐ Fast Onboarding
☐ Smart Tools

Finally, remember that you and your team are human. The work is hard, the hours are long, and the stress can be immense. It's important to **take a break**. Burnout is real, and it's a threat to your business. A resilient business is one that is sustainable for the long haul, and that means taking care of yourself and your people. Make sure you and your team know the signs of burnout and are taking regular vacations. It's a necessity.

Signs of Burnout to Watch For

In yourself:

- Constant exhaustion, even after rest
- Cynicism about work or clients
- Decreased productivity
- Health problems (headaches, sleep issues)
- Irritability with team or family

In your team:

- Increased mistakes or safety incidents

- Absenteeism or tardiness
- Conflict between crew members
- Decreased quality of work
- High turnover

Prevention strategies:

- Enforce time off policies
- Rotate high-stress assignments
- Provide mental health resources
- Celebrate wins and milestones

The strongest builders in the next decade will not be the cheapest or the fastest. They will be the ones with teams that can think, adapt, and care under pressure.





Chapter 3 Questions for You
Developing your team's resilience

What's the biggest skill gap on your team right now?

Who on your team could step up if you trained them?

What's one training or tool you need to invest in?

When will you make that investment?

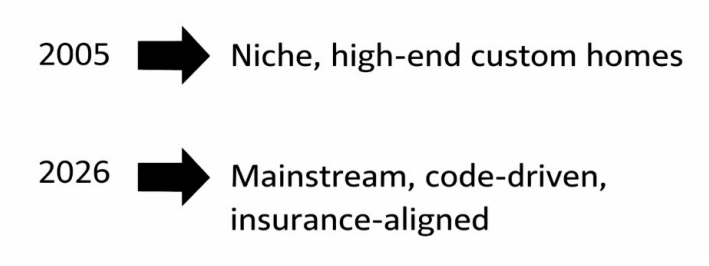
Chapter 4: The Green Advantage

Why sustainability is the future of construction

For a long time, “green building” was a niche market. It was for wealthy clients in California who wanted bamboo floors and solar panels. For the average builder, it felt like a luxury.

But that’s changing, and it’s changing fast. The same climate change that is driving more intense storms is also driving a massive shift in the construction industry. Sustainability is a core component of resilience. And the builders who get ahead of this curve are going to be the winners of the next decade.

How Green Building Changed



Green building moved from optional to expected.

There was a builder in Colorado who was rebuilding a home after a wildfire. Instead of just rebuilding what was there, he talked to the homeowners about using fire-resistant materials, about creating a defensible space around their home, about building a house that was smart. He used **recycled materials**, installed **energy-efficient systems**, and made a point to **minimize construction waste**. He built them a better, safer, more resilient home.

And you know what? They loved it. They told their friends. And now, that builder has a reputation as the go-to guy for sustainable, resilient construction in his area. He's a problem-solver.

Over 60% of home builders now report incorporating green or energy-efficient features as standard practice.

Source: NAHB

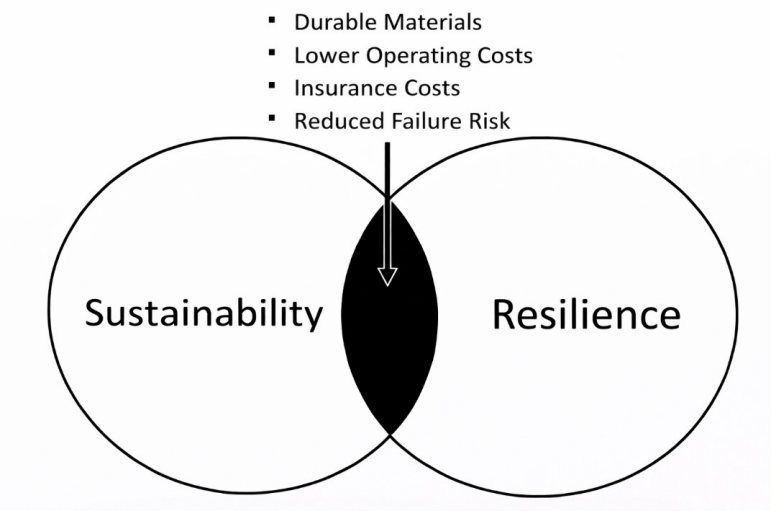
This is the green advantage. It's about understanding that a sustainable home is a more durable home. It's about seeing the connection between environmental responsibility and business opportunity. A good first step is to get certified in a green building standard, like LEED or the National Green Building Standard. It will give you the knowledge and the credibility to talk to your clients about sustainability.

How Sustainable Builders are Seen

Before	After
Contractor	Problem-solver
Price-focused	Value-focused
Replace what broke	Build what lasts

The market rewards builders who think ahead.

Sustainability and resilience are often talked about as if they are separate goals, but in practice they overlap more than most people realize. The same choices that make a home more sustainable also make it perform better when disaster strikes. Durable materials last longer and fail less often under stress. Energy-efficient systems reduce operating costs and help homes remain livable during outages. Insurance carriers increasingly recognize these features, which can translate into lower premiums or better coverage.



A sustainable home is a stronger home.

Most importantly, these decisions reduce the risk of catastrophic failure when conditions are at their worst. This is why sustainable construction is not just about efficiency or environmental responsibility. It is about building homes that are stronger, safer, and better prepared for the next storm.

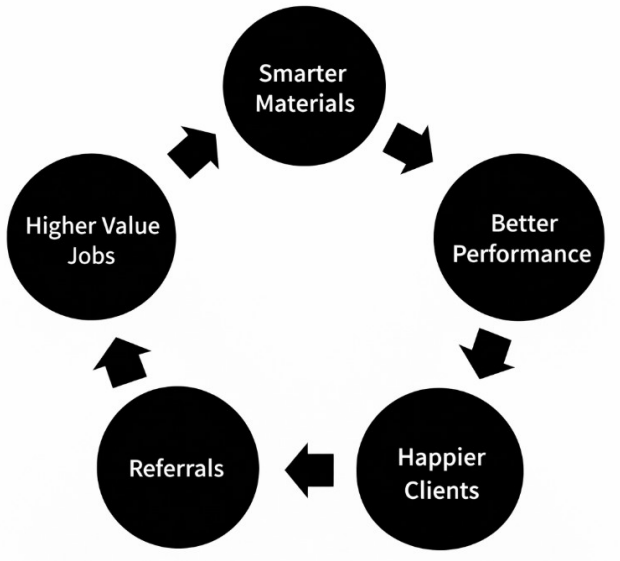
Why Homeowners Say Yes to Sustainable Builds

1. Safety
2. Durability
3. Lower insurance costs
4. Energy savings
5. Environmental impact

Clients buy protection before principles.

This also means being smart about the financial side of sustainability. Material costs are always in flux, and in recent years, we've seen unprecedented volatility. The builders who thrive are the ones who **plan for price increases**. This means staying on top of market trends, communicating with your suppliers, and building contingencies into your contracts. This means being prepared for the next storm and the next price hike. A simple way to do this is to include an escalation clause in your contract that allows you to adjust your price if material costs go up by a certain percentage.

The Green Advantage Flywheel



Problem Solvers Get Remembered.



Chapter 4 Questions for You
Why sustainability is the future of construction

What's one sustainable practice you could start offering?

Which of your clients would actually pay for it?

What's one certification or training you should get?

What's the first step?



Chapter 5: The Proactive Advantage

Why waiting for the storm is a losing strategy

A builder in Louisiana tells a great story. He had a long-time client, an older woman who had lived in the same house for fifty years. He'd done a few jobs for her over the years, and he knew her house was vulnerable.

So, one spring, he called her up and said, "Mary, hurricane season is coming. Let me come over and do a pre-disaster assessment. We'll document everything, check your insurance, and make a plan."

She was a little hesitant at first, but she trusted him. He spent a few hours at her house, took pictures of everything, and helped her put together an emergency supply kit. A few months later, a major hurricane hit.

Her house had some damage, but because they had done the prep work, the insurance claim was smooth, the repairs were quick, and she was back in her home in a fraction of the time of her neighbors.

Same Storm. Very Different Outcomes.

Reactive Approach	Proactive Approach
No documentation	Pre-disaster photos
Insurance chaos	Clean claim
Delayed repairs	Fast repairs
Long displacement	Quick return home
Contractor stressed	Contractor in control

Preparation shortens recovery.

That's the proactive advantage. It's about understanding that the work doesn't start after the storm; it starts before. The ROI is staggering: for every $1 spent on mitigation, you save $6 in recovery costs. [6]

Being proactive is a mindset. It's about anticipating problems before they happen. It's about having a plan. It's about doing the work upfront to save yourself a world of headaches down the road.

What a Pre-Disaster Assessment Includes

- ☐ Full photo documentation
- ☐ Vulnerability review
- ☐ Insurance coverage check
- ☐ Emergency kit guidance
- ☐ Repair priorities

This work pays for itself.

This means handling all the pre-work properly. Before you even think about breaking ground, you need to have your ducks in a row. This includes filing a **Notice of Commencement**, which is a legal document that protects your right to get paid. It also means getting the right **building permits**. Don't even think about starting work without them. A good first step is to create a pre-construction checklist that you use for every job. It will help you make sure you don't miss any important steps.

And before the first hammer swings, it's a good idea to have a **pre-construction conference** with the client. This is your chance to set expectations, to review the plans, and to make sure everyone is on the same page. A little bit of communication upfront can prevent a lot of misunderstandings later. Make sure you document the meeting with a written summary that you send to the client.

Pre-Construction Conference Agenda

- ☐ Scope review
- ☐ Timeline
- ☐ Budget
- ☐ Change order process
- ☐ Communication plan

And of course, the ultimate proactive strategy is to **plan your work, and work your plan**. A well-thought-out project plan is your roadmap to success. It should include a detailed schedule, a clear budget, and a list of all the materials and resources you'll need. It's the foundation of a successful project. There are a

number of software programs that can help you create and manage your project plans. It's a worthwhile investment.

How Proactive Builders Think

Anticipate → Document → Plan → Execute → Recover Faster





Chapter 5 Questions for You
Getting ahead of the storm

What's your biggest blind spot right now? (What don't you know?)

Who could you talk to this week to fill that gap?

What's one thing you should prepare for before the next storm?

What's your timeline

This is a free excerpt of When the Storm Comes by Andy Kruger: the front matter and chapters 1 to 5. © BuildSOS Inc.

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