The clean exit: off the job with nothing carried.

Margin is made in delivery and lost after it: liquidated damages at the line, retention held hostage, a defect liability period that turns into a second unpaid project. **This guide is the head contractor's close-out playbook — finish clean, get paid, and don't come back for a year of callbacks.**

01 Where the margin leaks after PC

THE REAL COST OF LOOSE ENDS

- [ ] **Retention that should be yours**
  Held against 'outstanding items' that were never properly recorded, priced or agreed. No register, no leverage.
- [ ] **The DLP as a second project**
  Vague close-outs become twelve months of disputed callbacks with your supervisors doing warranty work for free.
- [ ] **The relationship — and the next tender**
  Developers remember the last five per cent. A clean exit is business development you don't have to pay for.

02 Register discipline that protects you

EVIDENCE BEATS ARGUMENT

- [ ] **Record everything, including what isn't yours**
  Pre-existing damage, client changes, other trades. If it's not recorded at the time, it becomes yours by default.
- [ ] **Close by reinspection, with photos**
  A defect closed on say-so re-opens in the DLP. A photo dated the day it was verified never argues back.
- [ ] **Agree the outstanding-works schedule in writing**
  Anything carried past PC gets a price, an owner and a date — signed. That schedule is what stops retention games.

03 The last 12 weeks, run properly

A SEQUENCE, NOT A SCRAMBLE

- [ ] **Weeks 12–8: lock the certification path**
  Every certificate listed, owned and dated. This is the critical path nobody has on the programme.
- [ ] **Weeks 8–4: trade-by-trade close-out**
  Finish trades zone by zone and reinspect immediately, while their crews are still on site. Recalls after demobilisation cost triple.
- [ ] **Weeks 4–0: freeze and verify**
  No new works into finished zones without protection and sign-out. Most 'late defects' are damage, not defects.
- [ ] **PC day: hand over a pack, not a promise**
  Completed register, inspection records, outstanding-works schedule, certificates. Walk out with the evidence in their hands.

04 Why independent verification helps YOU

COUNTER-INTUITIVE BUT TRUE

- [ ] **It ends the duelling-spreadsheets game**
  One register both sides accept means arguments become line items, not meetings.
- [ ] **It gets retention released**
  An independent record that items are closed is exactly what a developer's board needs to release money.
- [ ] **It caps the DLP**
  A verified baseline at handover separates genuine defects from wear, damage and wish-lists for the next twelve months.

THE SHORT VERSION

1. **If it isn't recorded, it's yours.** Record everything, at the time.
2. **Close by reinspection** while trades are still on site.
3. **Exit with a pack** — register, records, schedule, certificates.

Walking into a contested close-out? An independent register both sides accept is Group 4's core service: group4consultants.com.au/service