



Bethliving : Training Needs Analysis

A report with recommendations

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Bethliving Team's Training Needs

The founding team at Bethliving wants to ensure that their customer-facing teams at their various stores across the country present a clear, concise and consistent picture about their products, processes and brand to their customers. These stores are managed in different formats - company owned and company operated [COCO], franchisee invested company operated [FICO] and franchise owned and franchisee operated [FOFO]. At present, there are 44 stores across India.

The objective of this project is to discover the current levels of understanding of the customer-facing/sales teams at the stores, identify the gaps and create a training plan along with the curriculum and roll-out the same. The plan was to do this in 2 phases:

- **Phase 1- Exploratory phase:** Interview the founding team, understand the brand ethos, the product USP and how they envision customer communication. Discover the current pitch and process understanding at the various stores by way of visits, interviews and mystery shopping. Identify product and process understanding gaps and structure the training plan.
- **Phase 2: Definition phase:** Create the training content, pilot it for a cohort, incorporate feedback and plan for detailed training content and curriculum development and delivery.

This report is for Phase 1 – Exploratory phase of the project.

1. Background

Bethliving aspires to be the interior designers and implementers of choice for families that prefer eco-friendly, sustainable and durable solutions for their home interiors. Their audience are families that are planning to buy a new home or renovate their existing one. Bethliving adopts a consultative approach while designing interiors for their customers, including customised production. This results in bespoke solutions that are both cost-effective and innovative.

Currently, its target market is India but the company plans to expand in the overseas market as well. Bethliving's management wants to create a robust foundation of systems and processes across sales, marketing and operations etc. to enable the company reach its growth targets.

Given the rapid expansion plans, the company wants to create training programs to enable new employees and franchisees to come to speed with the product details, customer interaction and the processes. The training should focus on (a) soft skills - understanding the customer requirements, sharing success stories with them, gaining their confidence before moving on to close a sale (b) product and process knowledge, including specifics about the products, sales process, CRM used and SOPs at the stores.

A senior Business Development Executive (BDE) will transition as the training head. Along with this individual, other BDEs, sales heads also will be trained etc. The training curriculum should be structured such that a few master trainers within the company can use it going forward.

2. The Process

We set out to understand the current processes along with products through discussions with the key team members. The current sales process and product understanding was done as calls and visits to a few stores. The summary of these discussions is included in the Appendices.

Discussions with the founding team - George Thomas, Arvinder Kaur and Toby Thomas gave valuable insights about how they want their products to be showcased and the process that has to be followed. They also specified the different measures (and hence metrics) that should be tracked to maintain quality, brand consistency and increase sales.

Krishnamurthy who is a senior BDE shared different success stories along with the training needs of the team as he envisages them.

Visits to the stores at Kammanahalli [Nehru Road], Thubarahalli and J P Nagar and discussions with the stores-in-charge gave insights about the experience of a walk-in customer, how products are showcased and a sale made. **Calls to Salem and Coimbatore stores** gave an understanding of the current process of answering incoming customer enquiries. These numbers were obtained through the current website.

3. Main Objective and Goals

The main objective of Phase 1 – Exploratory phase is to understand the gaps in the product knowledge, pitch and processes of the customer-facing / sales team and address these by designing a training plan for implementation.

The training should ensure that the customer-facing teams are able to

- understand the products, pitch and solutioning
- be able to pitch the products with the same conviction as the founding team
- present the solutions, products and processes consistently, clearly and concisely across all stores
- understand the success stories and how to use them based on context
- get better at communicating the brand ethos
- be able to close more deals based on the above

4. Observations and Inferences

Based on the interactions with the teams at the different stores, here are the main observations and inferences. These form the input to the training plan design.

4.1 Commendable

- Based on the interactions with the team members, it is evident that the customer-facing team members are convinced that the solution they offer and the products are the best.

- The overall recommendation about steel being eco-friendly, pest-free, ease of maintenance and long life came through quite well.
- The CRM process flow was explained quite consistently across the stores.

4.2 Gaps

4.2.1 Use of existing collaterals

- None of the team members used the company's brochure to explain the different types of products.
- The 9 benefits / USPs display in the store was not used to explain the benefits.

4.2.2 Product explanation

- The product pitch and the solutioning were not uniform across the stores. Two out of five team members were unclear about the solutioning.
- The explanation about the product, the type of steel [SS304, SS202], paint, installation to be more thorough. Currently, these sound as more technical jargon rather than helping the customer to make his/her decision.
- Explain the different types of material used in the show units displayed in the store. For a customer, a mere walk-through the store does not give any information.

4.2.3 Product positioning

- Brand wood vs brand steel : Brand value and ethos should come through.
- The team should know their competition [viz local carpenter to other steel interior manufacturers] and be prepared to handle objections and questions.
- The economy range of products, living and bedroom furniture did not come through consistently. The focus appeared to be more on kitchen units.

4.2.4 Sales process

- Two stores did not follow through with the call/visit. The teams should own the customer interaction. The desire to sell and thereby help the customer should be ingrained so that they do their best to meet their revenue targets.
- The team member should be more of a design consultant rather a sales person. Educate the customer about the choices. The sales call closed abruptly in 3 of the 5 stores.
- The teams should refrain from promises that they are not sure about – one store offered to give an extra can of paint to touch-up whenever the surface had scratches.
- The stores should have adequate personnel to attend to walk-ins and phone calls. Walk-in clients may not like to wait while the team member attends to phone calls.

4.2.5 Customer engagement and interaction

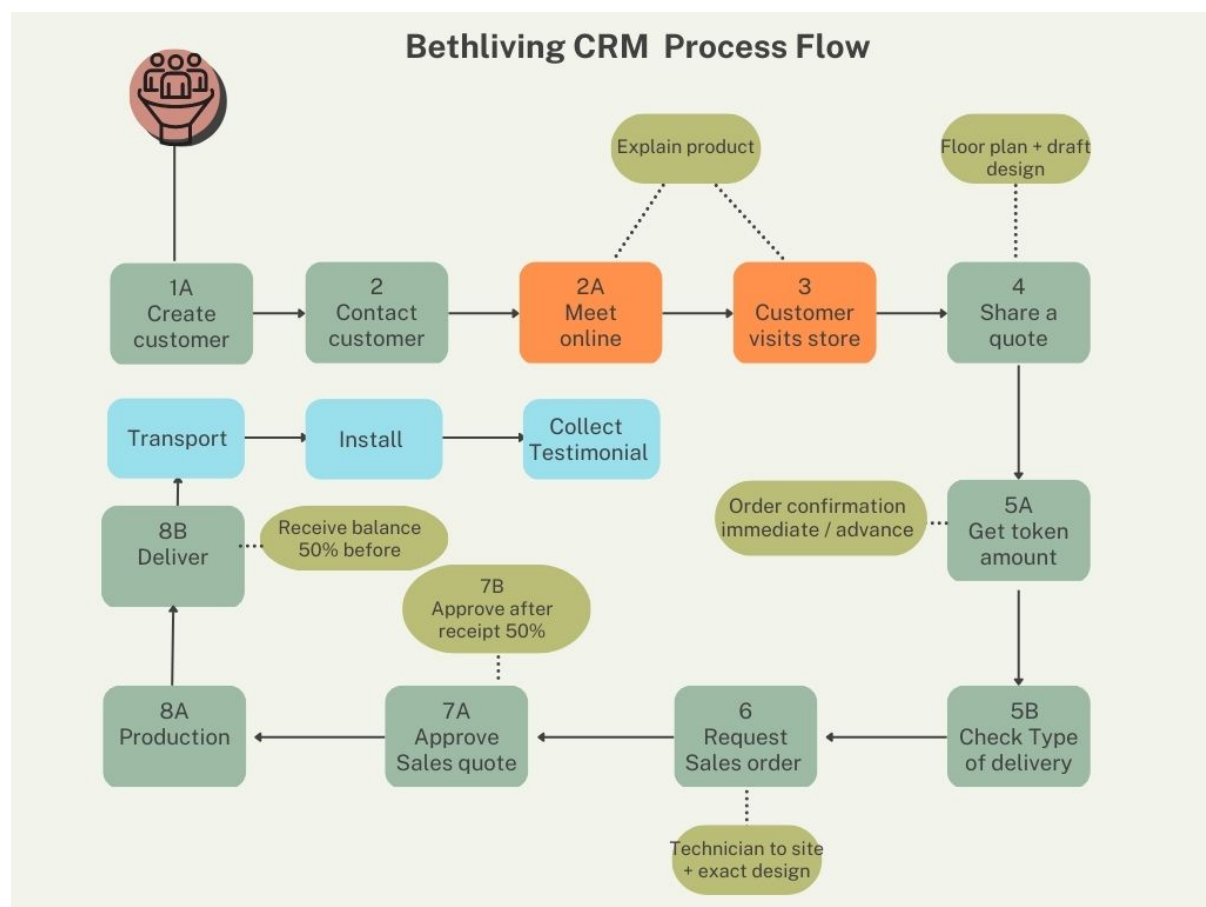
- All the interactions felt transactional. The team did not seek to probe the need behind the enquiry. Given that buying interiors is a huge investment and a hard decision for the customer, the team should be empathetic to the concerns of the customer.
- Greeting the customer, collecting details about the customer and their current need were not experienced in a manner to understand the customer.
- Need to exhibit more enthusiasm in showcasing the product – engaging the customer in small talk [e.g. asking about the family size, kitchen / room size, urgency of the request etc]

- In two of the five interactions, language was a barrier. A simple check on where the customer is (during a tele-call) or the language comfort (in store visit) should be done.

5. CRM process

The teams were quite consistent in explaining the flow from purchase to installation. They were also consistent in their belief that if the customer agrees to an online meeting and/or visits the store(s), they would sign up. The current receivables process works well, as per the discussions.

The management feels that rescinding the order post the token payment needs to be reduced through educating the customer and setting the expectations right.



6. Personas

Based on the founders' vision and the business needs, the following personas have been identified for training. Both the store-in-charge and the sales manager roles must evolve into master trainers, given the plans for expansion and revenue targets.

The installation team also interacts directly with the customer and given the stage they come in, they must also understand the nuances of customer interaction.



7. Training Structure

The current training in the CRM process flow and the 3D design have been institutionalised and seem to be work well.

The training should be enhanced with the following components:

7.1 Training needs – Product and Process

This should be mandatory for all the four personas, including the installation team.

These training units lend themselves for automation as the content is static in nature. These units can then be delivered to the team members in micro-units for them to absorb the content. And this process should be continuous. Quizzes and exit questions would be used to determine the level of understanding.

7.1.1 Product

- Know the details about the product [types of steel], solutions for different rooms of the house
- Learn the USPs of each of the product [what should be used where]. Example : the unit in high traffic areas should be completely stainless steel etc
- Solutioning [about what is possible, what is not]

7.1.2 Pitching and presentation

- Know the 9 benefits displayed in the store and the first 6 pages of the brochure
- Pitching the product and solutioning [30 secs, 2 mins and 10 mins] in a consistent manner
- The presentation for 10 mins [learn the sequence and the story]
- Know your competition [Chromatica, Godrej, local carpenter et al] with specifics, aesthetics
- Show case portfolio of different designs with different floor plans to establish competency and credibility

7.1.3 Brand ethos and success stories

- Understand what the brand Bethliving stands for
- Showcase the different structural units that go into the design, how are the units produced and how they differ from other brands [e.g. engineered with precision vs hand-made etc]
- Take pride in representing the brand
- Showcase testimonials

7.1.4 3D designing and CRM process [optional for installation team]

- [Continue with the current process](#)
- Document the steps
- Be an expert and provide recommendations to the customer for the design and the units involved. Too many choices may leave the customer confused. A confused customer will not be a confirmed buyer.

7.2 Training needs – Soft skills

For new employees, the following training components should be mandated. The master trainers should deliver these modules at regular intervals. Recommended frequency is to repeat some aspect of the training modules once a month for customer-facing teams.

The content in these modules are delivered as case studies and role plays. Frequent repetition would allow the team members to be consistent, clear and concise in their communication with the customers.

7.2.1 Understand the Customer

- Social etiquette (greeting the customer, small talk etc)
- Understand the customer through gentle probing [budget, requirement, urgency, challenges etc]; Get an understanding of what appeals to them [cost, design, sustainability]; Probe stated and unstated needs to cross-sell and upsell
- Confirm your understanding by paraphrasing / summarising
- Set expectations about the product and service; avoid
- Learn to handle objections [pricing, quality, aesthetics etc]
- Stay connected to your customer
- Find common ground / Empathise with their situation

7.2.2 Story telling for business

- Learn success stories of your company
- Know how and when to use them
- Lead the closure [showcase past designs based on similar floor plans / target group]. This allows you to get them to speak. Showcase factory video.

7.2.3 Adaptive Communication

- Change communication specifics based on the audience
- Demonstrate empathy [explain pros and cons and offer suggestions]
- Objection handling [Practice from a set of common objections and the ways to respond]
- Do the heavy lifting. Write down customer phone number etc. Do not ask the customer to do that for you.

8. Process redesign

The following processes can be enhanced to include the following:

8.1 Sales process

- Capture customer details when they walk in, even if they *appear* to be window shopping
- Provision to get customer's signature on designs so they do not rescind once they pay the token amount
- Process for follow-up [for e.g. duration of 2 days, 1 week, 1 month etc]

8.2 Capturing measures to compute metrics

- Measures for quality and for sales growth have been identified by the founders and included in appendix A. These have to be communicated to the team and they should be trained to achieve the target measures as a conscious process. This communication and measurement should be included in the current process flow.

8.3 Website

- The current website can be redesigned for a better user experience with a seamless transitions to the different pages.
- The design should be more intuitive with better aesthetics – choosing a store location feels clunky and the page refresh is a tad slow.

9. Training roadmap

The training modules will be created with the following input from the founders and senior team members:

- Founders to discuss the ethos of the brand, the production process
- Sales head to show how the in-store collaterals and brochures to be presented
- Senior sales team members to demonstrate the objection handling using role plays
- Marketing head to highlight the differentiation and USPs
- Interviews to draw out problem situations, solutioning possibilities and recommendations

The training roadmap is presented below:



10. Conclusion

Bethliving team should internally discuss and confirm the recommendations of product, process and soft skills training plan and the various personas. The next step would be to create the actual training content, pilot this to a small focused group of 10 seasoned customer-facing team members who would be the future master trainers, consider their feedback and finalize the training content.

The modules that would be considered for automation would be at the end of this phase.

Appendix A

Discussion with the Founders

Discussion Transcript

1. George Thomas, CEO & Arvinder Kaur, Director

The team has to understand the customer segment who are value conscious. The value of the house ranges from 35 lakhs – 1.5 Cr; approximately 10% - 12% of home budget is allocated to interiors. The team needs to ask leading questions to understand the customers' budget as diff types of products are available [Budget. – Galley]. The sales team should behave more like a consultant rather than a salesperson.

Highlight the brand [Bethliving] and the expertise of the founding team - a collective exp of 100+ years. Convey the value proposition that it is value for money and that delivery is always as promised. And sound out the company's ethos, which is to democratize interior design. Speak about the fully fitted concept, 9 benefits, safe transit, pre-engineered product, with expertise inbuilt. Highlight the benefits – hygiene, replaceability, easy to maintain, not done at site.

The company has 6 variants of the kitchen design and for every room of the house.

Inform the customer that the company's founding team feels very strongly for the environment as the furniture industry is responsible for deforestation. The factory uses 100% solar power with zero effluence and the paint used is lead free.

Make a bold statement : We will plant 2 trees for every kitchen we install. This will appeal to emotions.

Use Godrej almirah / bridges analogy. Show factory video here. Use stories: Flooding in Kerala / Cleaning during Diwali

Showcase expertise. Engage the customer. Use the 9 benefits and sell, do not over sell. Check which of the 9 benefits resonates with the customer. For example, understand what appeals [aesthetics / hygiene] to them, get a sense of budget, communicate the brand story, substantiate with credentials, google reviews. There are no limits on design options – the customer gets to design their own interiors with the design consultant.

Speed of closure is critical. It is a design + volume game. Larger the module, the more economical it is for the customer. With 30 diff colours, the choice is huge.

Walk-ins give a token amount to confirm their intent to buy that gets converted to an actual order later. Current conversion rate is 7% as against 4% of car sales.

Set the right expectation – this is critical. Almost like wood [avoid terminology like this]. Customer should get a real perspective.

Online design on GMeet. 40% sales from USA and Middle East. 40 YT videos ; 40-50 blogs : bring this up when appropriate

Plan for the future

Currently, sales are in the ratio of 60% Kitchen 40% wardrobes. Plan is to be reverse that. Kitchen is the anchor product. Start with the kitchen and upsell other rooms. Use the 12000 product repository units.

Processes

Processes have to improve in the following areas:

1. After paying token advance, people rescind.
Order cancellation [high enough]
Due to communication gaps [specific customization requests]
Make the customer to sign off on the order and design.
2. Use of CRM for sales, manufacturing and after-sales installation is present.
3. Everyone should have the same amount of drive and product knowledge.
4. Installations are done by technicians: On a scale, this process ranks at 4/10. This has to be improved.

Training:

Product training and process training is being given now on the following:

- 3D Planner
- CRM

Measure to be tracked: mainly Brand quality:

Measure 1 : Rejections

Measure 2: Customer feedback

Measure 3: Scraps

Toby Thomas

Head – Sales and Marketing

The first 30 mins are crucial. Engage the customer with product features, communicate well and explain the product. Then the customer will sit for an hour.

Use analogies to explain the product during customer interaction. Customers perceive steel as stainless steel [as fork and spoon]. Educate the customer first as this is a first step for their buy-in.

Need:

- Explanations should be uniform across stores and team.
- Team also communicates differently about what is possible.
- Product knowledge is not strong.
- Everyone should talk about the first 6 pages of the doc. Else discount selling will result.
- Features and values to be communicated, not discounts. **If a showroom has a high discounts, then it indicates high price comparison.**

The 3 elements in the logo should be explained first; in fact, the sales team should use the first 6 pages of the brochure to communicate with the customer as it will result in a closure. If this is not done well, the customers will demand discounts.

USP 1: Options of Steel | stainless steel | combination of both

USP 2: Truly modular [think TV and refrigerator]. The customer should also know what modular means; can be fixed easily.

USP 3: Zero wood product. Educate people about hard wood vs soft wood. Hard wood is good, soft wood like ply, MDF are warm and attract pests, fungus and undergo warping etc. Glue used in these have formaldehyde which is carcinogenic.

USP 4: Ease of maintenance [Bring in the analogy of SS sinks vs granite sinks]; no product distortion; microbial growth is high on soft wood / granite; Screws, nuts and bolts cause product distortion and damage. Use automobile analogy

USP 5: Hygiene : The units can be steam cleaned. If washrooms are washed every day, why not kitchens? Why do you think hospitals use only SS in their operating theatres?

USP 6: Pest free : Wood is warm by nature; can harbour roaches in the gaps and spaces in the product; fungus breeds easily when moist.

USP 7: Fire proof: Some steel kitchen brands use PUF as a filler which is a fire hazard. Bethliving does not.

USP 8: Eco-friendly: Saves 'x' number of trees from being felled.

Teams should use the 9 benefits of Bethliving kitchens displayed in every store to educate the customer. In Tier 2/3 cities, acceptance is going up. Also ticket sizes are higher than tier 1/metros due to kitchen sizes.

If prospects are willing to attend the online Google meet, then conversions happen. Next is the showroom visit.

Points to ponder:

- Should brochures / showroom displays be in the regional language in Tier 2/3 cities/towns.
- Can the brochure be improved?

- Were all the 9 benefits displayed at the stores used by teams for selling?

Customer acquisition

90% of outbound calls are for leads that come from campaigns

5% walk-ins

After a 30 sec pitch by [Murthy / Toby / regional sales], they are directed to the responsible stores, where the pre-sales team takes over. The customer details are entered in the CRM software and a lead is created.

99% of the customers ask about the price. Maximum help is needed in Stage 2A which is the online meeting. If the sales person is successful at that stage, then a showroom visit [stage 3] is arranged.

Measure to be tracked:

Measure 1: Sales

Measure 2: # of Google meets

Measure 3: quotes

Measure 4: Quotation size

Appendix B

Discussion Mr Murthy, Regional Head, Sales

Summary

Murthy comes across as a very passionate sales professional. He is upbeat about the product and his ability to close. His observation is that the sales team struggles at the conversion stage. When seniors step in, closures happen. He has good stories/anecdotes of closures that the team can use.

At the outlets, sales persons' attrition is a big concern. Also the team needs continuous training to help them recall facts about the product and present them well before the customer. The team also needs confidence building measures to handle objections, to be able to compare branded wood vs branded steel. The desire to close sales should be created – at present, most of them seem to be content with the fixed pay rather than to earn incentives. Lack of adequate staff at the outlets is also an impediment for a great customer experience when they visit.

The sales team should focus on selling through the month – the process should enable this, rather than to panic at the end of the month. Also, the level of product knowledge and sales skills at the outlet should be good – the outlet manager should be a trainer. Mock demos, role plays and scripts should be used in the training.

Appendix C

Experiences and Observations

Summary

Store visit - J P Nagar

The team at this outlet explained the product features well viz longevity, pest-free, water-resistant features, fire-proof, eco-friendly, noise free, different types of steel used etc. This was also the only outlet that spoke about the economy range of Gaalee and the solutions for living rooms and bedrooms.

As a first timer who was listening to the explanation, I wasn't clear [and hence convinced] about why I should choose one over the other – GI vs SS. And in passing mention, the sales team spoke about the unit being fire proof – that there is no filling and that was confusing. Also I couldn't understand the concern of the team why they are upset about customers checking the kitchen units with magnets.

Store visit - Thubarahalli

The team member at this outlet could converse only in Tamil and Hindi. He was convinced about his product – longevity, pest-free, water-resistant features. The way he explained the different types of steel used [car door vs utensils] was impressive. His demeanour was friendly.

When I asked him about a specific bathroom unit and one kitchen unit, he handed the query to the franchise owner [Mr Ismail?] over a phone call. I was told that I needed to bring the slab down and remove the bathroom sink. I specifically mentioned that these units were only a couple of months old, but I was told that unless I remove the sink and the granite slab, he cannot help. The call was disappointing as the conversation ended abruptly.

The team member at the outlet did not make any further attempt to understand my situation or ask any questions regarding the home / space.

I did not receive any follow-up calls. The visit lasted about 15 mins.

The store location is on the first floor but the map says 'above Health and Glow' which is no longer present. Instead an optical store [Titan Eyeplus] is present in place of Health and Glow. This landmark needs to be updated in the store address. Plus there is no parking available anywhere close to the store as it is a very busy road.

Store visit - Nehru Road

The team member [Ms Devi] was friendly, confident and helpful. Since she was helping a customer on the phone for quite some time. I waited until she was free to attend. She highlighted the pest-free, long life, water resistant quality of the product. She indicated that the higher price was worth the product's longevity. She mentioned ease of installation in passing but was able to explain the entire installation process. She also mentioned the design was done in consultation with the client. I

evinced interest in bedroom furniture but was more vocal about one unit in the bathroom and the kitchen.

I did not get any responses for my objections [*would like to change the kitchen after a couple of decades, whether she would be around to ensure that the company honours its promises with respect to painting the bedroom furniture if it peeled etc*]. When I questioned about the price, she recommended that I choose cabinets over drawers as this would bring down the cost. I checked about low-cost options but did not get a convincing answer i.e. answer was quite technical in nature. E.g. the grade of steel is xx. As a customer, it does not give me any info.

The team member did not ask any probing questions but said that single units were available and she would call back. I got a follow-up call 10 days later about the bathroom unit. There was no follow-up query about the bedroom unit.

The visit lasted about 45 mins.

The store location was incorrect in both the website & Google maps. Also, the name board is not visible even if you check from across the street due to the low hanging tree branch. I had to locate the store based on the clinic in the ground floor. I have mentioned this to Mr Murthy and Mr George [when I called for directions].

Call to the Salem outlet

The team member [Mr Vijay] answered the call. He sounded knowledgeable about the products and their features.

I asked him about a specific bathroom unit and one kitchen unit. And that these units were only a couple of months old. He mentioned that single unit were possible and asked me to send him a photograph of the area to his Whatsapp number. He did not ask for my name / phone number.

I did not receive any follow-up calls. I had spent about 3-4 mins.

Call to Coimbatore outlet

The number listed on the website went unattended. Instead a few minutes later, Swati from J P Nagar outlet called. She identified herself and the branch she was calling from. Not sure if this call back was planned or a sheer coincidence. She spoke only in Kannada and she mentioned that single bathroom or kitchen units were not possible.

The call ended in less than 2 minutes.