

# Rapid Problem Solving Process Secures Key Customer Relationship

Chemical

## CLIENT

The Sherwin-Williams Company is the largest producer of paints and coatings in the United States and among the largest producers in the world.

## CHALLENGE

A valued, long-term customer who is a leading manufacturer of healthcare equipment reported that test samples had failed a critical chemical resistance test. The customer uses external job shops to paint equipment parts and was puzzled when the exact same batch of paint passed the testing on parts painted by some job shops, while failing when painted at others. Paint retained at the Sherwin-Williams laboratory was tested for chemical resistance and passed. The problem remained unresolved for over a year.

## SOLUTION

Sherwin-Williams asked a cross-functional team from its sales and technical departments to use the Kepner-Tregoe Problem Solving and Decision Making process to troubleshoot the problem. As is often the case with Problem Analysis, when the team members specified the problem using pairs of Is/Is Not questions, they uncovered an area of sharp contrast. When they asked, "Where is (is not) the object when the deviation is observed," the data gathered on the passing and failing shops revealed an obvious distinction. The curing temperatures were significantly lower at all the failing job shops. The most probable cause was identified as a raw material change and an experiment was designed to confirm this as the true cause.

## RESULTS

Sherwin-Williams reformulated the paint to work at lower temperatures and now includes quality control testing at lower cure temperatures. The solution has been 100% effective. The customer was impressed and reassured by the solution and by the speed and effectiveness of the problem-solving process.



## Scorecard

- Saved over \$1,000,000 in coating sales
- Solved a complex problem with seemingly contradictory data
- Improved a key customer relationship