

2026 RBI Sales Triathlon

1st Round Role Play: Sherwin-Williams

Your Company

Founded in 1866, The Sherwin-Williams Company is a global leader in manufacturing, developing, distributing, and selling paints, coatings, and related products to professional, industrial, commercial, and retail customers. Sherwin-Williams manufactures products under well-known brands such as Sherwin-Williams®, Valspar®, HGTV HOME® by Sherwin-Williams, Dutch Boy®, Krylon®, Minwax®, Thompson's®, Water Seal®, Cabot®, and many more. With global headquarters in Cleveland, Ohio, Sherwin-Williams branded products are sold exclusively through a chain of more than 4,900 company-operated stores and facilities. In contrast, the company's other brands are sold through leading mass merchandisers, home centers, independent paint dealers, hardware stores, automotive retailers, and industrial distributors. The Sherwin-Williams Performance Coatings Group supplies a broad range of highly engineered solutions for the construction, industrial, packaging, and transportation markets in more than 120 countries worldwide. Sherwin-Williams shares are traded on the New York Stock Exchange (symbol: SHW).

The Prospective Customer

Pristine Painting was originally founded by Jordan Conover as an odd-job business in 1995 while Jordan was attending a local community college. He called the business “Jordan’s Odd Jobs,” but Jordan quickly realized two things: (1) he had a knack for sales and customer service, and (2) painting was the most profitable of the odd jobs he was doing. In 1997, Jordan changed the name of the business to “Pristine Painting” to reflect the company’s primary mission: to beautify homes and deliver exceptional customer service to its clients. Pristine Painting has grown to employ eight painters and two foremen.

You are meeting with Jordan to discuss the business relationship between Sherwin-Williams and Pristine Painting and to identify adjustments that may be needed in your approach to help both companies have a successful year.

Your Role

You are a Sales Representative for Sherwin-Williams, and 2026 will be your first year in the territory. You do not have a background in the painting business but have quickly learned that by asking good probing questions, practicing excellent listening skills, and leveraging your company’s resources, you are able to conduct very effective sales calls. You learned early on that having a customer-focused mindset when preparing for your calls has allowed you to get into your customer’s world, and you often find yourself identifying solutions to your customer’s needs.

Preparing for the Sales Call

The majority of your in-person interactions with Pristine Painting have been with Jordan's two main foremen, Fidel and Brandon. You met with Jordan when you first entered the role, and he told you that he expected you to mainly deal with Fidel and Brandon. He said he would call you if he needed anything, and those calls typically involve questions about specific products and requests for recommendations for particular substrates (fiberglass, concrete floors, metal roofs, etc.). You feel strongly about the customer service and support you have provided to Fidel and Brandon, and the store personnel work very hard to deliver exceptional service to all painters. Sherwin-Williams is the primary supplier for Pristine Painting, although Jordan will use other brands if customers request them. Call notes from their previous Sales Representative, captured in the Sherwin-Williams CRM platform, indicate that Jordan has obtained pricing from other suppliers to "keep Sherwin-Williams honest" on pricing, but there is no indication that Pristine Painting has shifted its business.

Jordan asked for this meeting today, and you suspect he will want to discuss the recent increase in his pricing. Annual price increases are common in the paint supplier business, and you know this is nothing out of the ordinary for Jordan.

As you prepared for this call, you noticed that Pristine Painting's sales with Sherwin-Williams have slowly declined over the last two years. Most of your more established customers reported that 2024 and 2025 were "OK" years with slight or modest increases, so a customer with Pristine Painting's reputation experiencing declines in back-to-back years stood out to you. You also noticed that Pristine Painting's primary product purchased from Sherwin-Williams is typically associated with the commercial market segment (office buildings, warehouses, schools, etc.). When you asked the store manager why they use a product called ProMar, the manager stated, "That's what they've always bought from us." A more suitable product for both Pristine Painting's clientele and the type of work they perform is Emerald. Emerald is a paint-and-primer-in-one product that offers exceptional coverage and washability, with a finish that helps prevent stains from penetrating. Emerald contains antimicrobial agents that inhibit the growth of mold and mildew on the paint surface and transforms walls with a beautiful, durable finish.

Other professional painters who perform similar types of work have shared that they appreciate Emerald's enhanced coverage, which has increased their productivity. They have found that using Emerald—and highlighting its features during estimates—has helped them secure more jobs with homeowners due to its reputation for quality. Emerald costs roughly 25% more than ProMar, resulting in higher material costs per project. However, you have learned that material costs typically represent only about 15% of the total cost of a paint project. You view the overall impact on total job costs as minimal and believe that upgrading from ProMar to Emerald would be a win-win scenario. Pristine Painting would likely increase productivity while positioning itself to win more jobs or potentially charge slightly higher prices due to using a best-in-class product. Your overall sales and profitability would also increase as a result of selling a higher-grade product.

Sales Call Objectives and Your Tasks

- Learn about Pristine Painting's outlook for the upcoming year
- Understand what has impacted their sales with Sherwin-Williams over the last two years
- Identify opportunities to upgrade the customer to Emerald
- Identify any additional opportunities to support the customer's goals
- Secure a follow-up appointment with Jordan to close a commitment and achieve the upselling opportunity

1st Round Role Play: Evaluation Rubrics

(On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is *strongly disagree* and 10 is *strongly agree*)

OPEN & BUILD RELATIONSHIPS (Gained attention and built rapport) – 15%

- Opened the meeting with Small Talk, transitioned to business, and developed a rapport.
- Gained client's attention by matching their communication style.
- Demonstrated enthusiasm and confidence.
- Demonstrated smooth transition into needs identification.

NEEDS IDENTIFICATION (Obtained a clear understanding of client's situation) – 20%

- Determined relevant facts about the client's concerns.
- Asked questions and listened to uncover the client's needs and requirements.
- Probed (asked more questions) to deepen understanding of their goals, needs, and challenges.

OBJECTION HANDLING (Eliminated concerns to client's satisfaction) - 25%

- Gained a better understanding of objection by asking questions and listening.
- Effectively answered the objection.
- Confirmed that the objection is no longer a concern of the client.
- Built trust in the relationship.
- Established credibility.

COMMUNICATION & PRESENTATION (Communicated well, demonstrated product knowledge, used visual aids, was clear and concise, used appropriate non-verbal communication) - 25%

- Effectively used verbal communication (active listening; restated, rephrased, clarified, probed for understanding)
- Exhibited product-market knowledge.
- Reinforced value in relationship with Sherwin Williams
- Highlighted the value by offering enhanced benefits to their employees and clients.
- Used appropriate/professional visual aids.
- Effectively involved the client in the conversation.
- Persuaded the client to build a relationship.

CLOSE (Took initiative to move the meeting to the next step in a smooth fashion with mutual commitment) - 15%

- Asked for the next meeting.
- The client agreed to a meeting to explore the Sherwin Williams ideas.