

**Client:**



**Role:**

Head of UK Distribution

**Sector:** Manufacturing | Industrial Coatings  
| Construction Products

## Finding the Right Operational Leader for a Critical Distribution Function



Stephenson  
Stappard.

### The Challenge

TOR Coatings is a specialist UK manufacturer of high-performance protective coatings, supplying products for the construction, industrial and infrastructure sectors. It is family-run but owned by RPM International and operates in high-volume, fast-paced consumer and commercial markets. As the business continues to grow, it has invested in a new distribution operation to improve customer service and strengthen its national logistics capability.

The company needed to recruit a Head of UK Distribution to lead this strategically important function.

However, this was more than a straightforward replacement. A previous appointment had failed to deliver the right long-term fit, and the leadership team wanted to avoid repeating the same outcome. They recognised that technical logistics experience alone would not guarantee success; they needed someone with the operational credibility, leadership style and cultural fit to build confidence across the business and lead an established distribution team.

For TOR Coatings, this was a business-critical appointment that would directly influence customer service, operational efficiency and future growth.

### Our Approach

Rather than searching purely by job title, we began by understanding the business and the lessons learned from the previous appointment.

Working closely with the leadership team, we explored what success would look like beyond the job description. The discussion focused on the qualities that could not easily be captured on a CV: resilience, people leadership, operational judgement and the ability to thrive within a collaborative manufacturing environment.

This insight shaped a targeted search across manufacturing, industrial distribution and supply chain businesses, concentrating on candidates who had successfully led complex operational teams while balancing customer expectations with commercial performance.

Every candidate was assessed against three equally important criteria:

- Proven experience leading manufacturing or distribution operations in a fast-paced and complex environment.
- Leadership qualities and cultural alignment needed to succeed within TOR Coatings' established business.
- A track record of driving business transformation, especially employing a continuous improvement mindset, tools and techniques.

By combining technical assessment with a consultative understanding of the organisation, we presented a carefully selected shortlist of candidates who genuinely matched the brief rather than simply meeting the specification.

## The Outcome

TOR Coatings appointed a new Head of UK Distribution with extensive operational leadership experience gained within manufacturing and distribution environments. They also brought experience in change management and continuous improvement.

The successful candidate quickly established themselves within the business, taking responsibility for the Washington distribution operation and providing the stability and leadership the organisation had been seeking.

Perhaps more importantly, the appointment demonstrated the value of recruiting differently the second time. Rather than focusing solely on operational credentials, the process placed equal emphasis on leadership style, cultural fit and the ability to work effectively within a long-established manufacturing business.

The result was a successful long-term appointment that strengthened an essential part of the company's operational infrastructure.

## Why This Matters

Replacing a senior operational leader after an unsuccessful appointment is one of the most challenging recruitment assignments a business can face.

The instinct is often to search for more experience or stronger technical credentials. Sometimes you need to look outside of your sector or industry with an open mind. The right candidate came from distribution, with SAP, WMS and continuous improvement already embedded.

This assignment demonstrates Stephenson Stappard's consultative approach to recruitment. By taking time to understand the organisation, listening carefully to stakeholder concerns and looking beyond the CV, we helped TOR Coatings identify a leader who brought not only operational expertise but also the personal qualities needed to succeed within the business.

For manufacturers, critical appointments are rarely just about logistics or supply chain. They are about finding leaders who can strengthen teams, improve operations and support sustainable growth.

## Key Results

**Challenge:** Recruit a new Head of UK Distribution following an unsuccessful previous appointment.

**Approach:** Consultative search combining operational expertise with assessment of leadership style and cultural fit.

**Outcome:** Successful long-term appointment to lead TOR Coatings' UK distribution operation.

**Added Value:** Helped the client redefine the qualities required for success, resulting in a stronger and more sustainable leadership appointment.

For this appointment, cultural fit and the ability to drive change with a continuous improvement mindset were key priorities for us. Peter took the time to fully understand our requirements and delivered a shortlist that gave us a range of strong options. We are extremely pleased with the appointment we made and the value they are already bringing to Rust-Oleum.

**Warren James, Chief Operating Officer**

The TOR Coatings logo, featuring the letters 'TOR' in a bold, white, sans-serif font on a dark blue square background.