Often when total quality management (TQM) does not live up to expectations, that failure is a sign that implementation of TQM was simply fashionable "management hype" or "window dressing" without strong organizational underpinnings. TQM can have staying power when it is backed up by leadership basics of training people thoroughly and seeking ways to expand the organization in this era of downsizing. A successful TQM program must feature strong leadership, mission and vision, a strong and available training staff, and well-developed internal and external communications. Implementing TQM in libraries may require a higher comfort level among librarians with the language of business and the spirit of entrepreneurship. Also, librarians need not try to rush incremental improvements. (Contains 34 references.) (BEW)
INTRODUCTION

In Beyond the Hype: Rediscovering the Essence of Management, Robert G. Eccles and Nitin Nohria cite 56 words and phrases as examples of the "abstract panaceas for organizational revitalization" that have been popular over the past ten years or so. Total quality makes the Top 56 List, as do best practices, downsizing, rightsizing, flattening, delayering, revitalization, restructuring, reengineering, the knowledge-intensive organization, the network organization, the self-designing organization, and knowledge workers.

While I feel that today's business prose is filled with hype (words that are here today and gone tomorrow), clichés that leave us miles from nowhere, and proposed organizational frameworks that are centered in never-ever land, I find it sad that total quality made Eccles' and Nohria's "management hype" roster. Whatever quality is — a sense that this is better than that or a way to bring about dramatic improvement in performance — it is not a flavor-of-the-month buzzword.

While I take exception to including total quality alongside such "new" notions as reengineering, I heartily recommend Beyond the Hype. Getting past today's rhetoric is necessary if we are to refocus on management basics. In particular, I concur with the authors that we must put "action back at the center of managerial practice." While I believe that TQM is an action-based, results-oriented system that increases customer satisfaction and vastly improves chances for organizational success, I have to say that I understand why so many business journalists are today relegating TQM to failed-fad status. The number of bad quality programs simply outnumber good programs.

The adoption of off-the-shelf quality programs continues to lead to failure. Senior executives who really do not want to change — yet feel they have to go through the motions — continue to refer to their window dressing as TQM. Strong organizational underpinnings are not in place.

Hardly a day goes by when we do not read about quality programs having not lived up to expectations. In the October 18, 1993 issue of Fortune, we read that "Signs of disappointment are everywhere. It [TQM] was supposed to have had all the answers." In the May-June 1993 issue of Harvard Business Review, Jeff Haley and Peter Cross write, "Our firm lost its direction implementing TQM. The owners viewed TQM as a marketing tool, enabling them to tout our company as being part of the fashionable total quality movement. But an empty TQM effort is worse than none at all. The announcement was made that we were to "go TQM." Management started the process by hiring a consultant to enlighten the work force on total quality concepts. We would be 'empowered' and a new culture would emerge."

We are living in a period where business leaders have seen fit to shed responsibility for success and to put the burden for success on the worker. All too often executives embrace TQM — as they did...
quality circles and teaming — with the mistaken belief that the concept puts the onus on the workers. The truth is that when a company has problems, the buck stops with its leaders. W. Edwards Deming, Armand V. Feigenbaum, Joseph M. Juran, and Philip B. Crosby all agree that management is responsible for problems: "Where there is a quality problem, the odds are overwhelming that the problem is in the system, and since only management can change the system, management is to blame for the problem."5 Because TQM must be woven into an organization's strategic objectives, quality must be introduced by executives who are both committed to continuously improving performance and willing to lead the effort.

From the start we should put to rest the notion that TQM is part of today's love affair with newness. Peter Scholtes, a consultant with Joiner Associates, says, "I suspect the first prehistoric humans discovered quality when they found out that they could do some things to make their lives better, to make their lives drier, to make their lives safer. They learned along the way to improve what they were doing, and they discovered quality."6 Lloyd Dobyns and Clare Crawford-Mason, in Quality or Else, say, "Certainly the need to manage for quality has been known for years." Andrew Carnegie, the American industrialist and philanthropist, wrote in his autobiography, "I have never known a concern to make a decided success that did not do good, honest work, and even in these days of the fiercest competition, when everything would seem to be a matter of price, there lies still at the root of great business success the very much more important factor of quality."7

Still others trace the quality vine as we know it today back to the late 1940s. "General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers in Japan after World War II ... wanted reliable radios, a lot of them, so that the occupation forces' orders and propaganda programs could be heard in every town and village in occupied Japan, and when Japanese manufacturers in the 1940s couldn't give the general what he wanted, he sent for Americans to teach them how."8 Whatever TQM is — an evangelical movement which can help organizations discover what their customers need or a first-order step in bringing about effective change — it is not a word that is going to disappear from our lexicon. Whether you subscribe to Peter Scholtes' view that quality dates back to prehistoric times or you see the vine taking root in Japan after World War II, the urge to improve the way we live and work has always been part of man's nature. In TQM we discovered the system by which we can bring about continual performance improvement. The next step is to work the total quality process into overall business objectives.

TIME TO GET POSITIVE

An army of consultants and journalists would have us believe that we live in a uniquely chaotic era which requires radical and revolutionary change to set things right. Eccles and Nohria ask, "Are we living in a period that is truly in transition from the Industrial to the Information Age? Are we moving from one historical epoch to another, during which radical and fundamental changes are taking place in organization and work? Are we witnessing the demise of one of the most successful social inventions in human history — the bureaucratic (in the nonpejorative sense, if that is still possible) organization? Or are all these revolutionary claims mere rhetoric?"9

I think that every leader and manager views his or her era as especially provocative. In The Essence of Leadership,
Michel Robert says, "The next trend that will become accentuated in the twenty-first century will be that of competition."¹⁰ Those days of the fiercest competition past are now the days of the fiercest competition present. I wager that twenty-first century managers will also refer to their era as these days of the fiercest competition and focus their energies, as we have, on developing the new organization. Eccles and Nohria point out that "Alternative ways of thinking about organization have been with us for as long as people have thought about management itself — which is to say, at least a few millennia."

They also point out that "When it comes to the basics of management, there is little new under the sun."¹²

While we certainly do live in challenging times, I don’t believe that we should approach change with a revolutionary mindset. Rather, we need to adopt a positive change attitude. Some may view this philosophy as bordering on heresy. Could the dozens and dozens of change books of the last ten years that exhorted us to revolutionize our workplace have been promoting hysteria rather than useful management concepts? Could have the hundreds and hundreds of magazine and journal articles that promoted off-the-shelf cure-alls for management ills been wrong? Well, some business experts are beginning to realize that there are no simple prescriptions to complex management issues. In a recent Harvard Business Review article, Nitin Nohria and James D. Berkley write, "In the majority of cases, research shows, the management fads of the last fifteen years rarely produced the promised results."¹³

Some business experts are beginning to question this concentration on newness and are asking, "Where have the leadership skills that successfully transitioned us through centuries of change gone?" The plethora of panaceas of the last ten years or so have not provided needed focus to American business. Some, like reengineering, have preached "revolution." Others have centered on "transformation" and "reformation." Eccles and Nohria say, "The quest for new organizational practices — for new words, new structures, new designs, new systems, and new strategies — has become a rather frenzied pursuit. We certainly do believe that change and innovation are important. Yet our experience and research has also led us to the conclusion that a certain skepticism of newness is necessary — that the constant talk about ‘new practices for a new age’ is short-sighted and may lead us both to misunderstand the past and to ignore what is really important in organizations."¹⁴

As an example of the crisis mentality that pervades today’s management prose, Michael Hammer and James Champy say, "A set of principles laid down more than two centuries ago has shaped the structure, management, and performance of American businesses throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. We say that the time has come to retire those principles and to adopt a new set. The alternative is for corporate America to close its doors and go out of business. The choice is that simple and that stark."¹⁵ "Stop, right there," Hammer and Champy seem to be saying to American businesses (for-profit and not-for-profit, alike), "and cross to our side of the street. Bring nothing with you from the past or the present. Do exactly what we tell you to do or prepare to die!" This statement is an example of the exaggerations existing in the crisis mentality.

I find prescriptive business writing that preaches revolution, reformation, and transformation self-serving and counterproductive. I don’t believe that we have to start over and create something totally different in order to be successful.
today. Rather, we need to converge the best of the old and the best of the new. Joe A. Hewitt, Director of Libraries at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, says, "I am especially concerned that the rhetoric of change has failed to form a sound basis for reasoned and nuanced transition strategies that will preserve the best of the present while capitalizing on advanced technologies." And that’s the problem: Change prose, all too often, centers on tomorrow and ignores yesterday and today.

We need to get back to leadership basics. According to Michel Robert, "Thinking has become a lost skill in American business." My sense is that this critical skill has not been lost but dulled by coarse rhetoric. Senior executives and managers have to sharpen their ability to think strategically, to think creatively, to make decisions, and to develop a culture that encourages everyone to innovate.

I spoke at the University of Oklahoma Libraries 1994 Conference and invoked the "risk" rhetoric, quoting Dow Chemical’s CEO, Frank Popoff, who said, "I want to continue to develop our real strength: our people ... we need to liberate and empower people to do their jobs. That will produce workers and managers with the guts to take a chance." Some weeks after the conference, I decided that “risk” and “chance” were rather ambivalent words that smacked of today’s hype. I don’t want to come across as recommending that libraries develop a cadre of pistol-packing employees who roam the hallways looking for risks and chances that they feel are in season. Rather, your objective should be to educate people so that they can both recognize opportunities that already exist and use change to create new opportunities. There has been much talk of late about the risk-taking traits of entrepreneurs, about librarians becoming more entrepreneurial.

This entrepreneur has always followed a business creed that says: Don’t even think about taking that step, making that move, unless the odds favor success. I don’t call that risk-taking; I call it exploiting opportunities. Leaders need to begin to motivate their people to innovate because new ideas produce opportunities.

We need to focus on expanding our organizations. Unfortunately many leaders today are so caught up in downsizing, rightsizing, and delayering that they have forgotten that their charge is to lead. In the October 21, 1993 Wall Street Journal, Peter F. Drucker writes about "The Five Deadly Sins.” He says, "The last of the deadly sins is feeding problems and starving opportunities.” Today, far too many talented managers have been assigned to problems by their leaders rather than to nurturing opportunities. Drucker warns, “All one can get by ‘problem-solving’ is damage containment. Only opportunities produce results and growth.”

Leaders have to extricate their key people from containment activity and, together, start to think of ways to expand the business. Expansion is driven, in part, by loyal employees doing quality work and by loyal customers who keep coming back, bringing others with them. Paraphrasing the Golden Rule: If a company wants loyal employees, it must be a loyal employer; if a company wants skilled employees who will meet customer quality expectations, it must train its people.

While the definition of quality has changed over the years — from yesterday’s focus on product to today’s focus on interfacing the business with its customers and suppliers — quality itself is basic, and focusing on basics keeps you attending to what’s important: strategy, innovation, and action that is centered on taking care of employees and customers.

American leaders have brought strategy,
innovation, and action to bear on challenges many times before and we can do it today even though business attention has shifted from quantity to quality. Dobyns and Crawford-Mason say, “The people who made policy in American business in 1945 decided that quantity was more important [than quality]. That decision was neither callous nor venal. Other industrial nations had been damaged or destroyed, so America had to supply much of the world’s needs and, equally important, buy the goods other nations could produce. At the same time, U.S. industries had to satisfy the domestic demand, which was incredible. To mass produce anything you need the parts, a way to put them together, and an efficient way to organize the work. Americans had discovered how to do all three.” The decision to produce quantity in the 1940s was a right decision for the times; it proved to be the engine that drove an economy that became the envy of the world, and it also met prevailing quality expectations. Today the right decisions for these times has already been made. Quality is no longer an option; it is an imperative. Customers’ expectations and choices have increased in this technological culture. It’s time to move away from words, clichés, and the obsession with newness. This does not mean that we close our eyes to new ideas; we should stay flexible and look at new managerial concepts that more fully utilize those skills and structures which have withstood the test of time.

Change is fundamental to all times. We need to ignore the crisis and doomsday rhetoric that is daily in our face and focus on leadership basics: strategy, innovation, and action. American business leadership does not lack the abilities and resolve to compete and win. The problem is one of leadership focus.

**REQUIRE UNDERPINNINGS**

Dobyns and Crawford-Mason say, “A quality program ... is extremely difficult and time-consuming to implement; there is no easy way.” Douglas Schaffer, writing in the September 1993 issue of *The Journal for Quality and Participation* states, “The reason for total quality’s existence, and the only justification for the enormous sums of money invested in it, is increased customer satisfaction and improved competitive position.” Given the degree of difficulty, the time demands, and the financial investment, one can say — with a certain degree of certainty — that TQM should not become every company’s cup of tea.

A few companies are getting along just fine without a formal quality program and they probably should not tinker with their success. Then there are many organizations that simply do not have the requisite foundation to get a real quality initiative off the ground. In between the “few” and the “many” are the tens of thousands of businesses that can benefit from TQM. Therefore it is useful to discuss the five critical underpinnings that must be in place before committing to TQM.

**Strong leadership.** Michel Robert says, “There are three fundamental skills of leadership. Without these, the leader will not be followed. The first skill is strategic thinking. It is the thought process used by a leader to formulate, articulate, and communicate a coherent strategy and vision for the organization.” Oz Nelson, CEO of UPS, says, “The bottom line is that as a CEO, you have to create a vision and coax your organization to embrace it.” The second leadership skill, according to Michel Robert, is innovative thinking. “Companies need to constantly find new opportunities in order to grow. He or she [a leader] must understand the process of innovation and be able to instill it in every member of the
organization. The third skill is the ability to deal with operational problems and decisions successfully."

If your management team is made up of individuals who can think strategically, think innovatively, and make decisions, then you have the most important TQM underpinning in place. If you do not have a strong management team, put your quality discussion or plan on a back burner. If skills are lacking, take time to learn them. You may discover that the issue is not one of skills, but rather one of timing: 1) key management positions are open; 2) staff is young and inexperienced; 3) the team is presently overwhelmed. If this is the case, then first take time to fill positions, mentor youth, deal with urgent needs.

Mission and Vision. Library leaders, in addition to fielding a thinking management team, must also craft a mission statement that outlines the purpose and direction of the library and articulates a strategic vision of what the business will look like when it gets where it wants to go. Susan Lee, Associate Librarian, Harvard College Library, says, "HCL's 1990 Strategic Planning Process was the beginning of an effort to redefine our organization both for now and for the future. The articulation of a revised mission, and, more critically, the development of a vision statement were the beginning of a continual struggle for redefinition."

In a supplement to the March 1994 issue of Chief Executive magazine, we read that "Companies must recognize what they do best. That is, they must know what differentiates them from their competitors, and what they might need to do to improve." All of the people in the library must know what business they are in, understand the strengths and weaknesses of the library, and be focused on improving every process that is critical to success.

Before you can even begin to plan a quality initiative, you'll have to answer: "What business are we in?" Then you can ask: "Why are we considering TQM?" Douglas Schaffer writes, "A company must begin the improvement process by defining their strategic business goals and integrating these into a plan to significantly improve organizational performance. The first step, analyzing the situation that creates the need for action and clarifying what needs to be accomplished, is probably the most important and the most overlooked."

Involving your human resources (HR) staff in the planning and evaluation process is critical. All people are not equal when it comes to coping with change and your HR staff must be both willing and able to play a critical role in helping employees acquire new skills and adjust to new responsibilities. Their commitment must be long-term. You will need HR's involvement during planning and implementation and "timing" should be a subject that is addressed early. Susan Lee writes, "The change process begun in 1990 can by no means be considered complete. After three years some people still resist, ignore, and blame, feeling no obligation to contribute to the process in a positive way."

Training Staff. The strength and availability of your training staff is another key underpinning. YBP's training budget has more than quintupled since the company adopted and adapted TQM in 1990. In implementing TQM, I discovered that we had not conducted a new employee orientation in over six months. We discovered that on-the-job training was usually being conducted by the least productive employee. Managers didn't want to assign their top people to training and even if they did, most did not possess the necessary skills to teach others. Therefore, we instituted a "train the trainer"
program. Rather quickly, other red flags appeared. We subsequently instituted ongoing monthly seminars for employees that cover a wide range of topics, including time management, negotiating skills, managing change (the most popular to date), and listening skills. The last is my personal favorite as I have discovered that listening skills are so very important to the success of any change process. Smilla Jaspersen, the heroine in Peter Hoeg’s fine novel, *Smilla’s Sense of Snow*, says, “Very few people know how to listen. Their haste pulls them out of the conversation, or they try internally to improve the situation, or they’re preparing what their entrance will be when you shut up and it’s their turn to step on stage.”29

TQM is the engine that also drove us to implement a supervisor’s training program and a management development program. Dobyns and Crawford-Mason note that “Juran says that the three most important items in a quality program are that the top people be in charge; that the people be trained in how to manage for quality; and that quality be improved at an unprecedented pace.”30 Don’t even think about TQM unless you are both willing and able to increase your training budget.

**Internal and External Communications.** Very few companies are great at communicating to employees or to customers. TQM will require that you improve your internal communications. Employees will not support TQM unless they are brought into a dialogue. Since quality is work force centered, employees should not have to deal with surprises. They must have a say in how their work is to be done. They must also understand the reasons why the organization is focusing on TQM, as well as the goals that have been set.

Most companies use a variety of tools to communicate — from monthly newsletters to quarterly staff meetings. While these can be useful, they are rarely enough. Rapid change requires frequent and effective communications. I’m a fan of weekly department meetings during which organizational goals can be updated, as well as departmental issues discussed. I also believe that senior executives should rotate through these meetings, be in attendance for part of each meeting, talk and listen to employees.

TQM will also require that you improve your external communications. I strongly suggest that libraries develop marketing strategies; create a marketing plan that effectively communicates the essence of its mission and vision statement to students and faculty. Libraries must build their customer base and if libraries want loyal customers, the customer has to be made aware of the library’s strengths. Like the “listen to employees” component of good internal communication, good external communication involves listening to customers. Librarians frequently tell me that they have adopted a TQM program because they want to “get closer to their users.” I ask, “Do you know how your users view your library today?” Usually, the librarian cannot answer the question to his or her own satisfaction. Then I ask, “Do you understand what value-added services your users will be expecting tomorrow?” More often than not they shake their head. Dobyns and Crawford-Mason say, “It is now generally recognized that the customer defines quality, but you have to stay ahead of the definition, meeting as yet undefined customer needs if you want to stay in business.”31 I’m a fan of issues and trends dialogue and we regularly bring together librarians and publishers so they can talk and we can listen. As more librarians bring faculty and students together — to conduct a dialogue — more librarians will
understand how their customers view their library today and what tomorrow’s expectations are.

These five foundation blocks are essential to the overall success of a business — any business. I believe that these underpinnings are equally important to the success of libraries. No company or library should undertake a quality program until the strength of all five underpinnings has been assessed and judged able to support the effort.

While many librarians, understandably, do not view the library as being a business, nor themselves as a businesswoman or businessman, they are, nevertheless, being admonished to become more business-like. Since I’m still not sure what more business-like really means when directed at the not-for-profit sector, I’ve temporarily resolved my dilemma by defining your charge to mean: Initiate those business activities that will enable you to be more successful.

Quality is not the only business word that should be evaluated by libraries as they seek to become more business-like. The first two words on my list of business words that I feel librarians must become more comfortable with are “competition” and “marketing.”

There are three other topics that I think are important to quality in libraries. The first concerns the language of business. When I use business jargon when talking with librarians, I often sense an air of discomfort. Yet, if “become more business-like” means to do as business does — from organizational design, to mission, to vision, to strategic goal setting, to positioning, to marketing — then librarians need to become more familiar with and accepting of the language of business. As libraries begin to take concepts, such as TQM, from Corporate America, the need to communicate becomes all-important. I recommend reading business literature such as, Business Week, Fortune, Harvard Business Review, and The Wall Street Journal.

The second concerns knowing your competitors. This is a concept that I believe many librarians find particularly troublesome. My answer to “Why?” is rather straightforward: Libraries are not going to escape the competition trend Michel Robert talks about in The Essence of Leadership. You already work in a competitive environment. There is today’s intra-institutional competition for funding, and tomorrow’s information superhighway. To get your fair share of resources you need to know who you are today and who you want to be tomorrow, and you need to know who your competitors are today and who will be knocking on your door tomorrow because they can put you out of business.

The last topic has to do with the pace of change that you should seek as you redefine your library. You have undoubtedly discovered by now that I’m not a fan of reengineering. I find its “heavy blasting” approach to improvement dangerous because of its insensitivity to the human side of change. Federal Express CEO Frederick W. Smith says his company “from its inception, has put its people first because it is right to do so and because it is good business as well. We refer to our employees as our most strategic asset because, quite simply, they are.” While not a fan of revolutionary business concepts, I am a fan of incremental improvement. Susan Lee says, “In changing an organization’s culture, it is essential to remember that many small steps create change. Singles can win games, particularly when you get enough of them. At the Harvard College Library we are focusing on building small wins and making continuous progress.”

Robert Schaffer and Harvey Thompson in “Successful Change Programs Begin with Results” urge businesses to
replace "... large-scale, amorphous improvement objectives with short-term, incremental projects that quickly yield tangible results." If you already have a TQM program in place, I urge you to stick with it. Avoid being seduced by panaceas that promise fast-paced improvement. If you don’t have a continuous improvement program in place and are thinking about funding a revolution, don’t. Take another look at TQM.

Let me simply say, from personal experience, that TQM works. Alone, it will not enable businesses to meet their strategic objectives, but it will play a big part. TQM is woven into my company’s strategic business plan and continues to help us meet goals. In 1986, we employed 154 people. Today, we number 175 — a 14 percent increase over eight years. Our sales during the same eight-year period increased 200 percent. TQM works!

NOTES


2 Ibid., 2.


6 Ibid., 50.

7 Ibid., 35.

8 Ibid., 10.

9 Robert G. Eccles and Nitin Nohria. Beyond the Hype, 19.


12 Ibid., 26.


14 Robert G. Eccles and Nitin Nohria. Beyond the Hype, 4.


19 Lloyd Dobyns and Clare Crawford-Mason. Quality or Else, 17-19.

20 Ibid., 5.


22 Michel Robert. The Essence of Leadership, 10.


24 Michel Robert. The Essence of Leadership, 10.


30 Lloyd Dobyns and Clare Crawford-Mason. Quality or Else, 70.

31 Ibid., 73.

32 Ibid., 114.
