The Keys to Total Quality by Stephen Covey

The key to a total quality company is a total quality person who knows how to program and use a compass. I've always liked the expression, "If it's going to be, it's up to me." In reality, you and me are the keys to total quality. It's what I call an inside-out approach to quality, and it's a cure for the cynicism that often comes with "yet another program."

As Donald L. Kanter and Philip H. Mirvis write in *The Cynical Americans*: "Many companies undertook programs in hopes of gaining a quick fix for productivity, quality and morale problems. Such innovations were marked by fads and easily recognized as a sham. Cynics aptly called this the 'program of the month' approach to change."

Programs of the month are characterized by external treatments of internal problems, by an outside-in approach. But quality must flow from the hearts and minds of the people doing the job. You simply can't manage yourself out of problems you behave yourself into. You can hire the hands and backs of people, but they volunteer their minds and hearts. **To get quality, we need a principle-centered, character-based, inside-out approach, meaning that we start with ourselves, our paradigms and motives.** This often requires personal changes not personnel changes, as it requires us to function effectively on four levels on the basis of four principles:

1. Personal trustworthiness
2. Interpersonal trust
3. Managerial empowerment
4. Organizational alignment

Trust is the foundation of total quality, and trust is made up of both character (what a person is) and competence (what a person does). A corporate culture, like the human body, is an ecosystem of interdependent relationships. If we seek quality with something other than a principle-centered approach on all four levels, our efforts will be necessary but insufficient. Many managers suppose that if they correct the structure and systems (programs), the problems with people (programmers) will go away. The reverse is actually true; **if you correct the people first, the other problems will go away.** Why?

Because people are the programmers, and they use systems and structures as the outward expressions of their own character and competence. Effective executives lead by principles. Principles are like a compass. A compass has a true north that is objective and external, that reflects natural laws or principles, as opposed to values which are subjective and internal. Values are maps. Principles are territories. And the maps are not the territories—they are only subjective attempts to describe the territory. The more closely our values or maps are aligned with correct principles with the realities of the territory, with things as they are, the more accurate and useful they will be. But, when the territory is constantly changing, when markets are shifting, any map is soon obsolete.

The map provides a description, but the compass provides more vision and direction. An accurate map is a good management tool, but a compass is a leadership and an empowerment tool. We are too locked into certain mindsets, into management by maps, into old models. The old quality model is obsolete. It's a road map. **The key to creating a total quality company is to first create a total quality person.**