Too many business executives, general managers, and owners get overly excited over the latest management "fad." They have included TQM (Total Quality Management), SDT (Self Directed Teams), and Empowerment.

These programs, and others like them, appear to offer tremendous promise in changing the way organizations in America operate, and the promise to bring us up to the level of how we want to operate. Unfortunately, most of the attempts to introduce these programs into business in this country have failed. Studies in Personnel Journal and the magazine of the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) have outlined the significant high cost of failure in organizations trying to incorporate these philosophies.

There are several reasons for their failure. For the most part, organizations tend to treat these programs like a weight reducing diet from Jenny Craig, Slim Fast, or Ultra Thin. These programs are great for a few months. You lose 20 to 40 pounds, then unfortunately too many of us go back to our old eating habits, and negate the excellent impact those programs had on us.

What's been proven about diet programs is that over the long haul they really don't work. If you want to lose weight, then you have to change your eating and social habits. The same thing is true of organizations. Management fads simply don't work. They are just like diet programs. If you want to become a service oriented organization, or a quality oriented organization, or increase your sales, then you have to change the culture of your organization on a permanent basis so that you don't go back to your old habits after a few months.

Another reason is that the organizations trying to incorporate TQM or any of the other programs do not allow sufficient time for the change in the culture of the organization to take place and make these programs work. These changes can take a few years.

An additional reason for the failure of these programs is that the people at the top have not really bought into the concept of providing quality products or services to their customers. They have not bought into
the self directed team concept of **giving up control** as manager, and **placing more trust** in their employees to make some of their decisions. Unless top and middle management in an organization are willing to give up some of their control and are committed to real quality work, these programs are forever destined to fail.

Every organization, sooner or later, **takes on the attitude of the people at the top**. The old expression 'The fish stinks from the head' certainly holds true in business. Any program introduced into an organization would have a better chance to succeed if the people at the top truly believed in it, and were sincere in their efforts to give it an opportunity to evolve in their company.

Unfortunately, too many managers look at these programs as a quick solution rather than a total change in their culture and way of doing business. Another reason team building type programs fail is because **it takes a three-step process to build a winning team**. It is difficult to take an existing group of people (many of whom may not be team players) and change who they are to fit the new culture. You're better off hiring people who fit the new culture.

Sports teams have tried to do that for years. More often than not, they have failed. They have found they need to do a better job of selecting players out of college who fit their values and their offensive and/or defensive system. If you had a football team that ran the ball well—to change it to a passing team would require getting players with different skills.

Sometimes they have to make trades with other teams to bring in the kind of talent they need. The same thing is true in business. To build a winning team, you have to **select people with the required qualities and personality that fits the culture of your organization**. You have to **train them in the skills and the attitude you want them to have** in dealing with customers and co-workers. Finally, you have to **treat them** with the dignity, respect, and recognition you want them to show your customers.

Many of the reasons organizations fail to implement TQM and other management fads, even though they are sincere in wanting to do so, is because their selection process has been so poor as to prevent them from bringing on board the type of individual who would fit into a team oriented philosophy.

Organizations in this country will continue to try these management fads. However, in order to do so, they must give it their full commitment. They must be persistent because it may take several years to change the culture of an organization.
They may also have to modify some of their personnel, either through termination or training, and also bring into their business the type of players necessary to build a team that can work together.

About the author... Harris Plotkin is the author of the recently published book, BUILDING A WINNING TEAM, and creator of the ABOVE and BEYOND customer service training program. For more information about employment tests, call Harris Plotkin at (800) 877-5685. He is the founder of The Plotkin Group. This 32-year-old management consulting and training firm uses the latest scientific employee testing programs to help organizations select and develop employees. They have several thousand clients in a variety of industries throughout the nation.