

You might have to look at possibilities for strategic alliances, joint ventures and sub-supplier co-operation. You have to consider outward investment through acquisition or the formation of joint venture companies. Back-to-back deals offering exchanges of market expertise and access to technology have all become part of export strategy.

And on top of it all, to succeed in the global market, companies must have an unrelenting focus on quality.

As the Conference Board has outlined in its study, quality goes much beyond traditional quality control. Providing customer satisfaction today entails employee participation and empowerment, teamwork among all parts of an organization, and continuous improvement of production and other processes.

This year, the Conference Board's report, "Customer Satisfaction Through Quality," was compiled following Canada's first International Executive Study Tour on Total Quality Management. Fifteen senior business executives toured organizations in the United States, Europe, and Japan that had earned solid reputations for quality.

Some of the 14 companies studied have moved beyond "satisfied customer requirements." They speak of "customer delight" -- going beyond stated requirements. These are the standards of quality that Canadian business must meet if it wants to tap into the international marketplace. Some are already there. A recent international study by the American Quality Foundation scores Canada highly in such areas as customer satisfaction as the primary focus of planning. In the study, Canadians do not fare so well in such areas as involving a majority of their employees in improving quality.

Ladies and gentlemen, the time has come to improve the quality of Canada's overall economic performance. Let us take a lesson from so many surveys and studies conducted by the Conference Board, the American Quality Foundation and others.

Just as Total Quality Management in a corporation requires the input and commitment of all employees, so the building of a prosperous Canada for the next century will require the input and commitment of all Canadians.

Canada is a very fortunate country. If we have some problems, we also have the tools at hand to solve them. We have the essentials: good schools and universities, trained and motivated workers, good infrastructure and many successful companies. Our greatest challenge is to organize ourselves to use these tools most effectively.