

WHITE PAPER—The first in the *Transitioning Into Leadership Series*



# **“It’s Not About Me. It’s Me & You.”**

## How Being Dumped Can Help First-Time Managers

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# Executive Summary

One of the biggest and most difficult changes for any leader is the one from an individual contributor or professional who does the work, to a manager who must continue to do the work and more importantly, leads others doing their work. It's important for a leader's long-term career to make that transition as quickly and successfully as possible. It's also important for the success and sustainability of any organization. Why? First-time managers make up the vast majority of the largest population of leaders in any organization—those at the entry- or first-levels of management. They directly lead a majority of people in organizations, as much as two-thirds of the workforce.<sup>1</sup> They are the pipeline for future leadership positions in the organization. And, they represent the leadership benchstrength of the organization.

Yet why is it that the *largest* population of leaders, the benchstrength and pipeline of future leadership talent in organizations, are the ones who get the *least* amount of money and support in training and development dollars; less than C-level executives, less than middle-level managers, way less than high potentials who may not even be managing?<sup>2</sup> First-time managers may be doomed to failure from the start. And it shows: One out of every two managers in organizations is deemed a failure.<sup>3</sup> That's 50% of your future top talent. Their failure may be the result of not being supported or given the opportunity for training and development early enough in their careers as leaders. First-time managers at entry- and first-level leadership positions have as much of a right for leadership development as others, but their voices so often go unheard. Organizations take for granted the difficulty of transitioning into leadership, and this blind spot is costly. Not supporting and developing first-time managers is wasteful, impedes work, and damages relationships. Ultimately, leaders and the led become turned off to leadership.

But the solution is simple: Help first-time managers realize what it takes to make a successful transition into leadership. This paper is the first in a series of papers meant to help you understand what first-time managers are going through so that you can help, support, and develop them. As front-line leaders at entry- or first-levels of leadership who manage individual contributors and professionals, first-time managers are so important to the success and future sustainability of your organization. This white paper will help you support and develop first-time managers by:

1. Introducing the cognitive mindset first-time managers must adopt—a spin on the **“It’s not you. It’s me.”** excuse people often use with relationship break-ups or when someone is about to be dumped: First-time managers must adopt the mindset of **“It’s not about me. It’s me & you.”**
2. Presenting research from the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL<sup>®</sup>) that found (a) the specific type of motivation for learning and development effective first-time managers have; and (b) the skill gaps first-time managers have in four specific leadership competencies:
  - Communication
  - Influence
  - Leading team achievement
  - Coaching and developing others
3. Detailing how first-time managers can go about applying the **“It’s not about me. It’s me & you.”** mindset to successfully lead others.

## Introduction

They've kept their heads down, worked hard, did everything they were told to do, and more. What's the reward for these top professionals and individual contributors in your organization? Oftentimes it's a promotion into management. Congratulations to the new bosses. No doubt, they are excited about this new opportunity. But then it hits them—they have never managed anybody one single day in their lives. Do you know how they feel? Many are confused. Helpless. Hopeless. Overwhelmed. Uncomfortable. Scared. Insecure. All of the above, all at once. And for so many of them who have succeeded at every stage in their lives in everything they have done, these feelings are new.

Now think about how widespread this feeling is. The largest population of leaders in your organization right now are people in entry- or first-levels of management and the vast majority of them are leading others for the first time in their lives, ever. Your organization is depending on their success; first-time managers (FTMs) are the pipeline for the top leadership positions of your organization in the future. Yes, many of them can be in that corner executive office one day if they want it. But look at the stats: One out of two managers is ineffective in their roles. Yes, 50% of your managers are ineffective or fail in their jobs.<sup>3</sup> Why?

Many FTMs don't realize that the transition from an individual contributor or professional who has done the work and done it well, to a manager who must now lead the work of others, is one of the toughest transitions they have to make so far in their working lives. It's so hard because the transition means going against something ingrained in all of us and natural to us since birth. Go back in time. Safe to say FTMs have said something like this before?

- "I studied hard and got my degree."
- "I interviewed well to get that job."
- "My efforts and skill make me successful at my job."

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Up to this point in life, the sole focus of many FTMs has been on “me” and “my” talents and abilities to get awards, accolades, and approval. That “me” focus brought recognition and rewards to them. It impressed others. It made people see how good they were. It made them feel good, feel valued, and made them stand out from others. It got them ahead. For FTMs, it truly has been all about “me.”<sup>4</sup>

That “me” focus is what makes individual contributors and professionals in organizations so effective. And it’s what even got them that promotion into their first managerial jobs. If you get to the real heart of why individual contributors and professionals get promoted to their first managerial roles, each one would probably say something like:

*“I got promoted to my first managerial role because of my dedication, my work ethic, my technical skills, and the accomplishments I made that directly contributed to the success of the team and organization. I get the job done!”*

For FTMs, it truly has been “all about me.” But as soon as they get that promotion, they can no longer rest on their own abilities, skills and technical savvy. Using “I” and “me” pronouns won’t make FTMs successful anymore as leaders of others.<sup>5</sup> If FTMs themselves don’t realize that they can no longer rely solely on their own skills and abilities, they will struggle. In fact, decades of research at CCL confirms a major reason why so many FTMs get tripped-up, struggle, and so often fail is because they focus so much on their own abilities, and getting their own work done that they neglect others. They can’t make the transition from a technical expert to a leader of people.<sup>6</sup>

So, one reason why many FTMs struggle is their own lack of ability, and possibly awareness, to move away from an individual contributor role to a leadership role. But there’s also another reason, something that organizations can change, *right now*. Think about any competition: a bad start out of the blocks will hurt future chances for success. Compared to the top management team or middle-level managers in organizations, so many FTMs get relatively no help, no support, no guidance, no development from the start. Nothing. Just a pat on the back and a “Go get ‘em” as final words of encouragement. Many FTMs aren’t provided with the means, support, and chances for development from the beginning to be great leaders. **FTMs aren’t educated on how to learn about leadership, what to learn, and how to apply what they learn.** So what will help FTMs be more successful? What follows provides a way.





## A Lesson First-Time Managers Can Learn from Being Dumped

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Have you ever thought you found that special someone in your life? You call, text, Skype, or FaceTime each other until the early morning hours. You talk incessantly about that person with your friends and family until they are sick of hearing about it. You wake up wanting to be with that other person. Your mind drifts to that person when you should be doing other things, like work. You even start thinking about a future together. It can't get any better.

Then something happens. Maybe the reason is obvious. Maybe it's not clear at all. Regardless, one of you says "We need to talk." You know what's coming next. Someone is getting dumped. And, it's a pretty sure bet that the following five words will be the excuse that signals the beginning of the end: **"It's not you. It's me."**

Now, we all know this line is all about breaking up and dumping someone, running away from bad feelings, avoiding conflict, and ending a relationship. Usually when someone uses this line, he or she really is saying "It's all about 'me'" and that "I am not good for you or worthy of you." Where is the spotlight and focus in the break-up line? Not you . . . Me.

But what does that break-up line have to do with leadership? When we talk about **"It's not you. It's me."** in a leadership context, we are not talking about blame, about firing someone, about leaving an organization. In a leadership context, **"It's not you. It's me."** is really about accountability, responsibility and where a leader puts the spotlight and focus—the same place as that break-up line: Not you . . . Me.

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So what does **“It’s not you. It’s me.”** have to do with FTMs? FTMs can’t have their focus be squarely on “me” and “my” own abilities, achievements, technical expertise, and personal desire to get ahead anymore. Now, we’re definitely not saying that ambition and personal excellence is bad. It’s perfectly normal for us to be motivated to succeed and do well in life. In fact, the ability to get the work done and done well were key reasons for promoting individual contributors and professionals into management in the first place. So was their technical savvy. But when it comes to leadership, what had been part of their mental make-up their whole lives—that relentless determination to get the work done, reliance on technical savvy, that focus on “me,”—all of that can no longer be the reputation of FTMs.

So what should FTMs do?

Granted, it may seem a bit of a stretch. But take the sentiment of **“It’s not you. It’s me.”** and flip it on its head. Rearrange a couple of the words. Have this now be the philosophy, mantra, and mindset when leading others: **“It’s not about me. It’s me & you.”** This means that a FTM’s focus has to (1) *shift* and (2) **expand**. First, it must *shift*: There is still a “me” focus but it must now shift to one that is about a person’s own enjoyment, engagement, and motivation to learn about leadership. Second, it must **expand**: A focus on “you” must now be included and integrated; focus on applying what was learned to “you”—the people FTMs lead. It’s about being accountable and responsible for the success of others. It’s no longer about “me” and what “I” can do. It’s about what “you” can do.



# The Cognitive Mindset of “It’s Not About Me. It’s Me & You.”

In order to successfully lead others as a FTM, **“It’s not you. It’s me.”** has to go. But for so many FTMs, they feel like they are put in a position where they can’t let it go. Take Claire for instance:

*“I still have to do the same work that got me promoted, IN ADDITION to leading a team. I was an individual contributor project manager, and now I lead a team of project managers, while still doing my project management work at the same time! I am still accountable for my individual contributor project management work in addition to the work of my team and their development. And, nobody has taken the time to teach me about leadership, and how to go about applying what I learned.”*

For Claire, and so many other FTMs, leading others is yet another responsibility that was added on top of the responsibilities they were already doing as individual contributors and professionals. But to be successful, FTMs must figure out how to balance being accountable for their own work, learning about leading others, and applying what they learned to be accountable and responsible for the work and development of the people they lead. To do that, a new mindset is needed. FTMs must move away from **“It’s not you. It’s me.”** and to something that frankly up to now, has rarely brought them praise, compliments, and admiration: **“It’s not about me. It’s me & you.”**

## What “It’s Not About Me. It’s Me & You.” Is NOT

Here is what some FTMs may be thinking:

*So I get that **“It’s not about me. It’s me & you.”** means that as a FTM, I need to focus less on “me” and my abilities and more on “you” who are the people I lead. So, what that means to me, is that I should start thinking about what I can get from others. I need to start asking the people I lead “What can you do for me?”*

*What that also means, is that people should do what I say. I need to start saying things like:*

- “You need to do what I tell you to do because I said so.”
- “Your way is wrong.”
- “You are the problem, not me.”

*That puts less emphasis on me and more of a focus on “you,” right?*

Well, not quite. It does not mean that FTMs continually blame things on others, use others for their own personal gain or say “My way or else.” What **“It’s not about me. It’s me & you.”** is really all about is taking the stance that a FTM must focus less on “me” and “my” abilities, and focus more on promoting and encouraging the success of “you”—the people FTMs lead. It’s about being accountable and responsible for the success of others. FTMs must now prioritize meeting the needs of others over their own personal needs. Successful FTMs must make others feel valued, engaged in the work, and must do everything they can to make others successful. FTMs must now say *“I am going to learn about leadership because it engages me. I will put what I learn to good use, and put the needs of you, the people I lead, over the needs of myself.”* That’s what **“It’s not about me. It’s me & you.”** is really all about.



Making the change sounds so simple. But it's not. So many FTMs don't realize that the individual skills and work that made them effective and got them that promotion to management are not what brings future success as a manager who successfully leads others. Or, they know, but they just can't let go of what made them successful individual contributors or professionals. Does this sound familiar?

*“Nothing gets done here the way I like it. I feel like I have to do your work. First, you don't even do the work I think you need to be doing. And, the work that you in fact do just doesn't measure up. My way is way better. I can do it so much better, so much faster and way more efficiently and effectively than you can. Just let me do it. It's easier that way and I know it will get done.”*

Or maybe you've heard something a little less harsh, but still the same outcome. Like what Claire is feeling:

*“I am continually struggling with the management aspect of my job, in addition to all my other responsibilities that never went away when I was promoted. Nobody took the time to teach me how to do this, and I don't know where to begin. Plus, my team just has too much work to go around. I feel like I have no choice but to carry a heavy workload. Everyone on my team has a full workload as well. If I am doing too much it's less about me not trusting my team to do the work themselves and more about me not wanting to overwhelm them with too much work. If I feel like they have too much to do and something new comes up, then I sometimes keep the new work and do it myself even though I often have just as much going on if not more.”*

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We've all heard these stories. Maybe we have even personally felt this way, or said these things. Many FTMs feel like they have to do all the work for various reasons. But let's look deeper into what is really being said in these stories. What really happens when FTMs take on or take over the work of the people they are supposed to be leading? What messages are they sending? Whether they know it or not, what's really being said is:

- "My way is better."
- "I don't think you can handle the work."
- "You are not good at your job."
- "I don't trust you."

And what about FTMs like Claire, who still do the work not because of a lack of trust, but because they have good intentions and don't want to overburden others? FTMs in Claire's predicament who keep the work send these messages:

- "I don't have the confidence in you to reach your fullest potential."
- "I don't really know what you could possibly achieve."
- "Maybe you could do these things, but I don't have the time or energy to find out so I am just going to do it and not even let you know about it."

Classic **"It's not you. It's me."** lines. Hearing these words can be flat-out damaging to people being led. Implicitly hearing them through actions can be just as destructive. So many missed opportunities of developing others occur because of these lines.

Successfully leading others as FTMs means understanding that they can no longer focus 100% of their effort and energy in doing the individual work that got them the promotion into management in the first place. Their job now is to cultivate a sense of support and engagement in the workplace so that others thrive. They have to trust that the work will be done by others, and their words and actions need to show it, too. FTMs have to give the opportunity for others to shine and be

successful. FTMs must actively talk about what needs to be done, why it needs to be done, and why it's important. And, by giving people important work, and ensuring they are engaged in the work, FTMs in fact are offering a challenging opportunity for others to grow and develop. A FTM's whole mindset has to become **"It's not about me. It's me & you."** To be successful, FTMs have to say:

*"When leading others, my focus needs to be less on me, my skills, abilities, and achievements, and the work I do. My focus needs to first shift to one that enjoys learning about leadership. My focus then needs to expand, apply what I learned and include 'you'—my direct reports, the people I work with and lead. It's not about what I can do; it's about what you can do. I should regularly ask myself this question: 'What am I doing to create an environment where the people with whom I work are fully engaged and learning day-in and day-out?'"*

If FTMs can take on the **"It's not about me. It's me & you."** mindset, they will have more success and become more valued by their organization. How can FTMs put this mindset into practice? Books, webinars, blogs, tweets, news articles, experts, and talking heads in the media all have opinions. It's no wonder many FTMs are lost, confused, and helpless before they even get started. So let our research on actual FTMs help you.

# What the Research Says: The Type of Motivation Needed and How the Focus Must Shift

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Thousands of leaders have come to us at CCL to attend the three-day Maximizing Your Leadership Potential (MLP) program. Our research on actual FTMs who attend MLP will give you insight into the type of focus, motivation, and skills FTMs need to be effective.

There are different reasons and motivations to learn about leadership and to go through leadership development. One reason, it makes us look good in front of others. It impresses others and brings us recognition. Researchers call this “self-focused *extrinsic* motivation.” You may notice, it’s not so coincidentally aligned with **“It’s not you. It’s me.”** Another reason is just out of the sheer joy of learning. We enjoy learning for learning’s sake. It’s fun, and we love the feeling of engagement that comes with learning about leadership and developing our leadership. Researchers call this “self-focused *intrinsic* motivation.” You may have noticed it’s the shift in “me-focus” that is part of **“It’s not about me. It’s me & you.”**

What our research says, is that FTMs who are seen as better performers by their boss have higher levels of both of these motivations compared to FTMs who were rated as poor performers by their boss. But that’s not the whole story.

Looking deeper into the data, FTMs with higher job performance ratings **had much higher self-focused intrinsic motivation levels than extrinsic motivation levels.**

FTMs with low performance ratings? Just the opposite—their self-focused extrinsic motivation was much higher than their self-focused intrinsic motivation. The motivation of poorly performing FTMs was all about how learning and development would make them look better than others and how it would bring them recognition. They had the **“It’s not you. It’s me.”** mindset.

No doubt, it is impressive to go through leadership development. It’s great to be recognized. But from the start, FTMs must *shift* their focus on “me” towards learning about leadership for the joy and engagement that comes with learning and development. Highly performing FTMs got it—they understood that their focus on “me” had to shift. And FTMs can’t do it on their own—organizations must support FTMs and promote how important making that shift is.

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# What the Research Says: The Four Skill Gaps and How the Focus Must Expand

So the “me” focus of effective FTMs shifted. But what about the focus having to expand to “you?”

Another way FTMs get valuable feedback in MLP is through their 360 feedback.<sup>7</sup> On the first day of the MLP program, FTMs get feedback on 13 important leadership competencies. In particular, they receive two critical pieces of information:

- What competencies are important for success as a leader in their organization
- How well or poorly are they performing on those same competencies as a FTM

No matter who said it (FTMs themselves, or their bosses, peers, or direct reports), no matter what industry FTMs worked, no matter where they were from, the findings were clear. These four competencies picked as important for success were also ones FTMs struggled with a lot:<sup>8</sup>

- Communication
- Influence
- Leading Team Achievement
- Coaching and Developing Others

That means there are four huge skill gaps for FTMs. What’s more, our research found that the better these FTMs were at each of these competencies (as rated by their own direct reports), the higher their job performance (as rated by their bosses).



## Practical Tips and Application

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Now that you know the required motivation, and what needs to be learned about leadership, here's how FTMs can apply the **"It's not about me. It's me & you."** mindset with a focus on communication, influence, leading team achievement, and coaching and developing others.



## Communication

We're only human. So, as humans, we tend to do what's natural and comfortable. When it comes to communication, we do the same thing: We tend to communicate with others the way we like to be communicated with. For instance, FTMs may want "just the facts" like the detective Joe Friday from the old TV series *Dragnet*. So, they probably just want to hear only the absolute bare minimum. And, because it's the natural and preferential way they like to be communicated with, FTMs will probably tend to have those same, straight, to-the-point conversations with others. It's only natural. It's worked before. **"It's not you. It's me."** But for so many other people out there, many of them probably the ones FTMs manage, they want to hear more. They want to be engaged in conversations, be part of the decision-making process, and especially, don't want to be talked to but want to be heard. So, encourage your FTMs to talk with others (not to others, *with* others). Have them understand the importance of listening to others to understand what they are saying. Encourage your FTMs to take the **"It's not about me. It's me & you."** approach and reflect on this:

*"I want to be engaged in the learning process on different ways to communicate, and then I must communicate with you the way you want to be communicated with."*

So how can FTMs put this into practice? Here are some tips:

- **Be an active listener.** Ever notice that *listen* and *silent* have the same exact letters in them? To be a great communicator, FTMs need to be silent and listen. Let the other person talk. Don't interrupt them. And when it's your turn to talk, ask questions to clarify or probe what was said to get a good understanding of the other person.
- **Say what you mean to say.** It's not just the words to a John Mayer song. People tend to pay more attention to nonverbal behaviors (voice tone, gestures, postures, facial expression) than verbal messages. So, FTMs need to make sure that their nonverbal behaviors are in sync with their verbal message.
- **Be clear and articulate with your written and oral words.** The best communicators are the ones whose messages come across to all different types of audiences in all forms. FTMs must get their point across and be clear no matter the medium: written, when talking to someone face-to-face, over the phone, over Skype or video conference.
- **Broaden your communication style.** Effective communicators know that a "one-size-fits-all" communication style won't work across all people and situations. So, FTMs need to develop a wide range of communication skills and deploy different methods for different people in different situations to suit them the best.



## Influence

“Without influence, leadership does not exist.”<sup>9</sup> Because they manage others, their “boss” title gives FTMs the inherent power and ability to influence their direct reports. But FTMs can’t say “Because I said so” all the time. FTMs have to keep their employees engaged and must use different ways to influence through persuasion or motivation. And, their “boss” title won’t do any good when FTMs have to influence people above them and around them on the org chart. Like communication, because we’re human, we tend to influence others the way we like to be influenced—it’s just the most natural and comfortable way of doing things. If FTMs tend to be influenced (or

even energized) by a discussion of hard facts, figures, and data, then their natural way to influence others is through the use of hard facts, figures, and data too. **“It’s not you. It’s me.”** Yet, if people around FTMs are swayed less “through the head” and more “through the heart” with how a decision will affect their own lives, their own values, their own beliefs, or the people around them, the most convincing facts, figures and data imaginable will never be convincing. FTMs need to use the influence approach that best fits the other person’s needs, not their own. Encourage your FTMs to take the **“It’s not about me. It’s me & you.”** approach and reflect on this:

*“I want to be engaged in the learning process on different ways to influence, and then I must influence you the way you want to be influenced.”*

How should FTMs think about influencing? There are many ways<sup>10</sup> but here are four ideas to consider:

- **Influence through the head.** Talk about the logic, facts, figures. Present a logical argument with supporting evidence. Tap into a person’s rational and intellectual positions.
- **Influence through the heart.** Connect the message, goal or project to the other person’s goals and values. For many people, an idea that promotes feelings of well-being, service or sense of belonging has a good chance of gaining support.
- **Influence through the hands.** Some people will do what you want them to do, if you do something for them in return. Or, involving others collaboratively (doing things together) or through consultation (talking about the ideas others have) may help accomplish a mutually important goal.
- **Influence through the legs.** Leaders are role models. They help lead the way forward. Because they are leaders, all eyes are on FTMs whether they realize it or not. FTMs can gain influence by acting in ways that reflect strong character and integrity.

## Leading Team Achievement

A team is not a group. A group is people who have no shared objective, no shared outcome. A team however, consists of interdependent members who share a common goal. FTMs don't lead groups. FTMs lead teams. With so much work done in a team environment, it is essential for FTMs to be able to lead their teams to achieve a common goal. Let each person know about the goals of the team. Draw out the best in each person

on the team. Work behind the scenes unselfishly to remove any obstacles or barriers so that the team can get the glory. These are the things FTMs do when they successfully lead their teams. FTMs could even start to say: **“It’s not about me. It’s me & you. And you. And you. And you . . . working together.”** Encourage your FTMs to think about this:

*“I need to be engaged in the process of learning how to lead teams. Then, I need to use that information to make sure I do everything I can so that the team is effective. I have to find out what engages each person on my team, and try to set an environment so that each person is engaged in the work of the team.”*

CCL has found that leadership is a shared social process. We know effective leadership is happening when we see these three outcomes: direction, alignment, and commitment, or DAC.”

- **Direction.** Make sure each person agrees what the team is trying to achieve. Is there agreement on the collective aim, mission, vision, or goal? Do we all agree on where we are headed?
- **Alignment.** Make sure each person knows his or her roles and responsibilities, and what others are doing, so that there is coordination and integration of all aspects of the work. Is there organization and coordination of the work? Does our work fit together?
- **Commitment.** Make sure everyone is dedicated to the work. The success of the team, more than any individual praise, is the top priority. Is there a willingness to subsume individual efforts and benefits within those of the team? Are people passionate about the work?





## Coaching and Developing Others

Clearly, FTMs can no longer do the work that got them promoted. But they sure can mentor, coach, and develop those who are doing the work. In fact, FTMs should be spending a major portion of their time coaching, developing, and mentoring others. And, it can be rewarding for them as well. Our research at CCL shows that managers who mentor, coach, and develop their own direct reports are generally seen as better performers<sup>12</sup> and more promotable.<sup>13</sup> So mentoring, coaching, and

developing others doesn't just benefit the one receiving it. Doing it is beneficial for FTMs as well. Mentoring, coaching, and developing others truly is a gift, one that is just as good to give as it is to receive. When FTMs coach and develop others, their focus truly expands to "you"—to those they lead. They truly think less about "what I can do" and more about "what you can do." Encourage your FTMs to take the **"It's not about me. It's me & you."** approach and reflect on this:

*"I can't do the work that got me promoted anymore. I have to want to learn about coaching and developing others. I then have to step away from doing the work, and help you, mentor you, coach you and develop you to do your work to make you successful."*

What are some things FTMs can do to coach and develop others? Here are some proven tips:

- **Promote and brag about the success of others.** Make sure FTMs let others, particularly those in higher management, know how successful their direct reports are.
- **Provide feedback.** Make sure FTMs give both positive and developmental feedback, to their direct reports especially. That is the only way direct reports will know whether they are doing a great job, or if they are not, how they can become better.
- **Provide challenging opportunities.** The only way people will be challenged is if they actually get something that is challenging. Allow FTMs to give others a difficult, yet attainable task to accomplish (and if it's a high-profile one, that's even better). Urge FTMs to coach others when they make mistakes. Encourage growth and development. If their direct reports succeed, FTMs will too; they will be seen as talent scouts, with good judgment and credibility.

# The Cultural Contingencies of “It’s Not About Me. It’s Me & You.”

Some FTMs may be managing people on the shop floor or in the cubicles around them. They will see their employees every day, and many of their employees come from the same backgrounds. But that doesn’t mean that every single employee is the same. Face it, we are a global economy. FTMs may have to manage people from different countries or cultures in their workplace. Some FTMs may be managing people who live in different cities, different countries, different time zones, and different cultures. So what should FTMs in this situation think about when it comes to the cross-cultural aspects of leading others?

Our data on FTMs was global. Bottom line, no matter where FTMs were in the world, they need to have a **“It’s not about me. It’s me & you.”** mindset. They must have an intrinsic desire to learn about leadership and apply what they learn particularly to *communication, influence, leading team achievement, and coaching and developing others*. Where cultural differences could play a role is in the subtleties and art of performing these four competencies effectively. So, FTMs may need to learn more about *how* to best communicate with someone, or influence someone, or lead a team, or coach and develop someone, from a different background. Give them the information and time to discover the subtleties of leading diverse individuals.

Luckily, FTMs in our research were very skilled at *adapting to cultural differences*. That competency was the third-highest competency (out of 13) on the 360 as rated by FTMs themselves and their bosses, and was the highest from peers and direct reports. What that means is that FTMs in our study are very strong at *adapting to cultural differences*. So, encourage FTMs to:

- Be open to learning about and experiencing different cultures and customs. Allow them to do it because it is fun, interesting, and exciting.
- Be sensitive to differences between cultures.
- Be understanding of the perspectives of others.
- Be adaptable.

When leading people of different demographics, backgrounds, or cultures, FTMs must find the joy in learning about others intrinsically satisfying and must want to learn about each person individually. Effective leaders don’t treat everyone the same. They want to understand what engages each person individually. That’s what **“It’s not about me. It’s me & you.”** is really all about when leading people of different backgrounds and cultures.



## Conclusion

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It might have been a stretch at first, but by now it should make sense. Take the lesson from being dumped (or the excuse you might have given the person you last dumped), and flip those five little words. Adopt the **“It’s not about me. It’s me & you.”** mindset. A FTM’s responsibility, accountability, and focus must *shift* and **expand**. Encourage FTMs to *shift* their focus away from “me” and “my” abilities that got the promotion to management in the first place and towards the joy, satisfaction, and engagement that comes with learning to be a leader and in leadership development opportunities. Urge FTMs to **expand** their focus to include “you” and apply what is learned in order to work through and with others for the benefit and success of those being led. Help FTMs be accountable and responsible for the success of others, particularly when it comes to communication, influence, team achievement, and coaching and developing others.

Ambition is a good thing. There’s nothing wrong with wanting to succeed. And by having a healthy balance of focusing on “me” and “you,” FTMs can accomplish those ambitions. So give FTMs support. Give FTMs the much-needed development that so often is overlooked. Once you do, you will set a foundation for successful careers up the organizational ladder to middle-management and even to the very tops of organizations. You will strengthen your leadership pipeline. Help FTMs adopt the new cognitive mindset they must have to succeed. **“It’s not about me. It’s me & you.”**

## More to come

Future papers in the *Transitioning into Leadership* series will describe what first-time managers are going through, their work context, and work environment. You will learn how to help, support, and develop first-time managers to enhance their leadership. Papers in this series will cover the actual leadership challenges first-time managers face, and will go much deeper into several leadership competencies important for their success.

## About the Research

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Data used for this white paper is from participants of the Maximizing Your Leadership Potential (MLP) Program of CCL between May 2012 and December 2013. Each participant completed 360 assessments usually between two and eight weeks before his or her respective program. At the beginning of the program, each participant completed a survey asking about their motivations for learning. Our final sample consisted of 664 practicing managers who participated in MLP programs offered in Greensboro, NC; San Diego, CA; and Brussels, Belgium. Of the 664 MLP participants,

297 said they were managing for the first time in their lives. These were the FTMs that were the focus of this study. They averaged 36.57 years of age ( $SD = 7.82$ ), were majority male (55.2%), mainly from the United States (65.7%), and well-educated (82.9% had a least a college education). Most (78.1%) worked in the private sector from several diverse industries (e.g., computer software & services; consumer products; energy; food, beverage, tobacco; insurance; manufacturing; pharmaceuticals).

## About the Maximizing Your Leadership Potential Program

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To effectively lead others as a first-time manager, you need a solid grip on your own leadership style, strengths, and weaknesses—as well as an array of tactics for getting the best performance out of others. Maximizing Your Leadership Potential (MLP) addresses your specific leadership challenges and prepares you to achieve results by leading others. MLP is for first-time managers, those who are about to become first-time managers, and those who currently lead individual contributors. They may have been recently promoted or are experiencing new pressures within a current management role. Throughout the three-day interactive program, managers will focus on specific skills and how-to's that they can set in motion right away. They leave the program with a stronger connection to their roles as managers and are more prepared to drive action by leading others.

Special Features of MLP include:

- **Intense feedback.** The most comprehensive assessment of the critical leader skills at this level provides deeply personalized data for feedback and improvement.
- **An interactive hands-on format.** Tangible steps and how-to's prepare participants to take action upon returning to work.
- **Take-home tools.** Resources are tailored to support newly-enhanced skills, such as influencing and communication.
- **Personal coaching.** 100 minutes of one-to-one coaching during the classroom session plus a 45-minute post-classroom coaching call.

Register for the program here: [http://devsolutions.ccl.org/Maximizing\\_Your\\_Leadership\\_Potential](http://devsolutions.ccl.org/Maximizing_Your_Leadership_Potential)

# References

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<sup>2</sup> O'Leonard, K., & Loew, L. (2012, July). *Leadership development factbook*® 2012: *Benchmarks and trends in U. S. leadership development*. BERSIN & ASSOCIATES FACTBOOK REPORT.

<sup>3</sup> See the following:

- Gentry, W. A. (2010). Derailment: How successful leaders avoid it. In E. Biech (Ed.), *The ASTD leadership handbook* (pp. 311–324). Alexandria, VA: ASTD Press.
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<sup>4</sup> It may even be a cultural phenomenon. Research shows an increase of the words “me” and other first-person singular pronouns (“I” and “mine” and “myself”) in song lyrics and books over the last 25–50 years. See the research of psychologists Jean Twenge or C. Nathan DeWall for more details of this interesting trend.

<sup>5</sup> In fact, leaders and others with high power and status actually tend to use the pronoun “I” considerably *less* than nonleaders and others with lower status and less power. For more information, see the research of psychologist James W. Pennebaker.

<sup>6</sup> One of the main reasons why managers derail in their career is too *narrow functional orientation*—they can't make the transition from technical mastery to effectively managing and leading others. Read the research in footnote 3.

<sup>7</sup> A 360, also known as 360-degree feedback, or multisource feedback, is a way for people to be assessed on how well or poorly they are performing in certain areas from the person himself or herself, as well as his or her boss, peers, direct reports, or relevant others inside and outside the organization. The benefit of using 360s is that the person gets to see a “whole” or “360” degree view of performance, a panorama of perceptions rather than just self-perception. Using 360s can paint a more complete picture of how well a person is performing from many different perspectives.

<sup>8</sup> These four competencies were the biggest skill gaps as rated by FTMs themselves and their boss. For peers, influence, and leading team achievement were the top two skill gaps (communication was fourth, coaching and developing others seventh). For direct reports, coaching others and leading team achievement were the top two (communication was fourth and influencing fifth).

<sup>9</sup> Northouse, P. G. (2013). *Leadership: Theory and Practice* (6th ed.). Los Angeles: Sage. Page 5.

<sup>10</sup> A great resource is: Yukl, G. (2012). Influence tactics for effective leadership. In E. Biech (Ed.), *The ASTD leadership handbook* (pp. 73–87). Alexandria, VA: ASTD Press.

<sup>11</sup> See the CCL white paper Making Leadership Happen by Cynthia McCauley for more details. <http://www.ccl.org/leadership/pdf/research/MakingLeadershipHappen.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Gentry, W. A., Weber, T. J., & Sadri, G. (2008). Examining career-related mentoring and managerial performance across cultures: A multilevel analysis. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 72*, 241–253.

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## About the Author

**William A. (Bill) Gentry, PhD**, is a senior research scientist and coordinator of internships and postdocs in Research, Innovation, & Product Development at CCL in Greensboro, NC. He also trains the Assessment Certification Workshop and Maximizing Your Leadership Potential programs at CCL and has been an adjunct professor at several colleges and universities. In applying his research into practice, Bill's current focus is on helping leaders who are managing for the first time in their lives. Bill has more than 70 academic presentations, has been featured in more than 50 internet and newspaper outlets, and has published more than 40 peer-reviewed articles on leadership and organizational psychology including the areas of first-time management, multisource (360) research, survey development and analysis, leadership and leadership development across cultures, leader character and integrity, mentoring,

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You can follow Bill on twitter ([@Lead\\_Better](#)) and CCL ([@CCLdotORG](#)) as well. Use #1stTimeMgr to continue the conversation online about first-time managers and transitioning into leadership.

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