

WHITE PAPER—Second in the *Transitioning Into Leadership* Series



Understanding the Leadership Challenges of First-Time Managers Strengthening Your Leadership Pipeline

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Executive Summary

An individual contributor or professional getting promoted into his or her first formal leadership position in an organization is one of the biggest and most difficult transitions for any leader. Far too often, the leader and the organization take for granted just how difficult that transition is. And the numbers prove it: 20% of first-time managers are doing a poor job according to their subordinates, 26% of first-time managers felt they were not ready to lead others to begin with, and almost 60% said they never received any training when they transitioned into their first leadership role.¹ No wonder 50% of managers in organizations are ineffective.² Their ineffectiveness may be the result of not realizing what they are getting themselves into when it comes to leading others, not being supported in their new leadership role, and not being given the opportunity for training and development early enough in their careers as leaders. Think of the time and money that has to be spent on replacing these ineffective leaders, not to mention dealing with the low morale and disengagement of employees working under these ineffective leaders. This inevitably hurts your leadership pipeline and may eventually hurt your organization's bottom line.

First-time managers have as much of a right for leadership development as others, but their voices, time and time again, go unheard. They want to do well but so often are struggling at making the transition from individual contributor or professional who does the work and does it well, to a leader who must continue to do the work and more importantly, leads others doing their work. Many first-time managers feel that no one understands what they are going through. So what can you do to help? Here's a simple and doable solution: Understand the struggles first-time managers have and help them overcome the challenges relevant to their new leadership role. This white paper backs the effort by:

1. Presenting the 12 challenges first-time managers have, as found by researchers from the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL[®]) and Davidson College.
2. Specifically providing detail with the three most-often mentioned challenges:
 - Adjustment To People Management/ Displaying Authority
 - Developing Managerial & Personal Effectiveness
 - Leading Team Achievement
3. Offering ways for you to help first-time managers effectively deal with these challenges.

The information from this white paper will help you understand the perspective of first-time managers and the struggles they have. You can use the information to support first-time managers in the most difficult transition they have made so far in their careers, develop them as leaders, and ultimately, strengthen your leadership pipeline.



“Recently, I was promoted from within the organization to lead the department that I was a part of, now managing direct reports who used to be my peers. How do I best transition from former peer to new boss?”



“As my role transitions from one where I was responsible for my own work as a chemist to now being responsible for leading a team of chemists (in addition to finishing out the current project which I started previously) I find myself lacking the internal tools to effectively do my job. Before I was a good-to-excellent chemist. Now I am an OK chemist and OK manager. Further, many of the attributes which gained me recognition as a chemist are now hampering me as a manager.”

Introduction

This is what it feels like to be leading other people for the first time in your life in organizations. These quotes from first-time managers (FTMs) give you a glimpse into the difficulties, struggles, and challenges that FTMs face every single day. Their technical savvy, the stuff that helped them get that promotion to management in the first place, won't fix everything anymore. They can't concentrate solely on their own work anymore. Now, they are the boss. Now, they have to understand, motivate, and meet the needs of others, many of whom they worked alongside with previously.

And these difficulties, struggles, and challenges are not from just a few people. Many FTMs are part of the largest population of leaders in your organization right now: frontline managers in entry- or first-levels of management. **FTMs are your next generation of leaders, the pipeline for the top leadership positions of your organization, and represent the leadership benchstrength of your organization.** Clearly they are an organizational imperative to success. Yet, the numbers suggest they aren't treated that way. Consider these examples:

- Many FTMs are frontline supervisors at the entry- and first-levels of management. Though they have never managed anyone before, FTMs at these first-levels of management lead a majority of people in organizations (as much as two-thirds of the workforce³) and average about 10 direct reports, more than any other level of management whose leaders are more senior, seasoned, and experienced.⁴ This begs the question: **Why are organizations giving first-time managers the most people on average to manage?**
- In 2012, this *largest* population of leaders, frontline supervisors at entry- and first-levels of management, got the *least* amount of money and support in training and development dollars.⁵ More troubling, 58% of FTMs never get any sort of training to help them in their new leadership role in the first place.¹ This begs the question: **Why are organizations not adequately preparing people to lead?**

No wonder so many FTMs feel hopeless, overwhelmed, and unsupported from the start. No wonder 50% of managers are ineffective in organizations.²

A change is needed. Thankfully, organizations are now starting to get the message: FTMs at entry- and first-levels of management need training and development. In 2014, Bersin by Deloitte⁴ found that 29% of training budgets went towards first-level managers, which is the highest for any level of managers in organizations. That's great news. But deeper in the data, it's still the same old story. The amount of spending per participant for first-level managers is still much lower compared to the spending per participant at higher levels: companies tend to spend around twice as much per middle-level manager as they do a first-level manager and depending on the size of the company, spend anywhere between two times (small companies) to five times more (medium and large companies) per senior- and top-level executive as they would a first-level manager.⁴

Think about the costs in not preparing, not developing, and not providing training for your FTMs, your future leaders. They may become ineffective in their job and you eventually have to replace them. So what's the cost behind that? Granted, replacing one of your top executives—which some estimate around 15 to 20 times a person's salary, upwards of close to \$3 million per executive²—probably is more worrisome than replacing a FTM. But if you are constantly replacing ineffective managers who are on the frontlines, those comparatively

small costs per leader can add up to extreme expenses rather quickly. A recent survey by DDI⁶ concluded that one in four organizations reported a loss in profit due to frontline leader failure. Furthermore, nearly 60% of their survey respondents indicated poor frontline leadership resulted in turnover of leaders themselves or their team members, 65% reported a loss of productivity and 69% reported loss of team member engagement, all due to poor frontline leadership.

What do these numbers suggest? Not preparing FTMs weakens the leadership pipeline and may hurt the bottom line of any organization. But you have the power to change that for your organization. How? Understand the exact challenges FTMs struggle with in their new leadership role. By knowing their challenges, you could then provide the right means, support, and resources, such as better (or more appropriate) training initiatives and developmental opportunities so FTMs can overcome their challenges and be better leaders. Think of the difference you can make in the lives of FTMs, the costs you can save your organization, and how your leadership pipeline will strengthen.

Fortunately, what follows will help FTMs and support your organization's succession plan. We first present the challenges FTMs have that our research uncovered. We then offer several ways to help and support FTMs in overcoming the challenges unique to their transition into leadership.

What the Research Says: The Leadership Challenges FTMs Have

Thousands of leaders around the world have come to CCL to attend the three-day Maximizing Your Leadership Potential (MLP) program. Our research on actual FTMs who attend MLP can give you insight into the most-often cited challenges FTMs have in their new roles as leaders in their organization.

As part of their pre-work before attending MLP, FTMs were asked what their three biggest leadership challenges are in their current role and they typed in their answers into the pre-program forms. The actual words provided by each FTM were content analyzed and coded into categories by researchers from CCL and Davidson College. Table 1 shows the 12 challenges that emerged from the data in order of frequency mentioned, and Table 2 displays the definitions of each.

Table 1
The Leadership Challenges FTMs Have

Challenge	Frequency (% of FTMs that Mentioned Challenge)
Adjustment to People Management/Displaying Authority	59.3
Developing Managerial & Personal Effectiveness	46.1
Leading Team Achievement	43.4
Managing Internal Stakeholders & Politics	33.9
Motivation of Others	27.1
Performance Management & Accountability Issues	24.1
Coaching, Developing, & Mentoring Others	21.4
Communication	17.6
Delegation & Micromanagement	17.6
Conflict Management	15.3
Working With a Range of Employees	14.2
Doing More With Less	5.4

Table 2

Definitions of the Leadership Challenges FTMs Have

Adjustment to People Management/Displaying Authority—Any expression of difficulty establishing or asserting one's authority. Difficulties associated with moving from a coworker to a superior and gaining respect while maintaining established positive personal relationships. Adapting to the new responsibility that comes from moving from individual contributor to a manager. The ability to influence, manage, and coordinate employees that are not in one's direct line of authority.

Developing Managerial & Personal Effectiveness—Concerns with becoming a better leader while still being a productive employee, including: time management; stress management; relationship management; acquiring leadership skills; acquiring job-specific skills specific to one's industry or organization.

Leading Team Achievement—Providing guidance to one's team and leading the team especially when directions or goals/expectations are unclear. The ability to give directions to team members and monitor the team's work in order to stay organized and meet deadlines. Building a team. Team chemistry.

Managing Internal Stakeholders & Politics—Asserting one's opinion to upper-level management or superiors including speaking for one's own subordinates or department. Gaining visibility with upper-level management. Gaining an understanding for an organization's corporate structure, and of the organizational culture and/or organizational politics. Navigating a change implemented by the organization for oneself as well as for the team/direct reports.

Motivation of Others—The ability to motivate others, both direct and non-direct reports. This includes inspiring all subordinates in general to complete assigned work as well as encouraging others to go above and beyond expectations or put in more effort than the minimum requirement. Understanding what motivates others and being able to motivate without monetary incentives.

Performance Management & Accountability Issues—Overcoming any reluctance or lack of comfort giving feedback about poor performance to subordinates. Holding subordinates accountable for their actions. Effectively dealing with employees who are lacking in ability, knowledge, or experience.

Coaching, Developing, & Mentoring Others—The act of developing subordinates' knowledge, skills, and abilities. Mentoring and coaching team members specifically pertaining to their overall career development.

Communication—The ability to communicate with people of all levels within the organization, including team members, superiors, and peers or additional work streams. Not only keeping lines of communication open, but also figuring out ways to communicate in order to achieve the best outcome. Effectively communicating goals and/or expectations with subordinates and superiors.

Delegation & Micromanagement—Ability to identify what tasks have to be done by oneself versus what tasks can be given to subordinates. Knowing when to interfere or provide assistance to team members without micromanaging or taking over a task. Giving up control (for example, the mental adjustment from wanting to complete all tasks individually to allowing others to take ownership of work). Trust and comfort with others doing work that FTMs will ultimately be responsible for.

Conflict Management—The ability to proactively manage or reactively resolve conflict between group members. Identifying and addressing smaller issues before they turn into larger conflicts and mitigating conflict once it occurs. The ability to deal with confrontation and/or resistance from team members.

Working With a Range of Employees—The ability to effectively work with and lead employees that have different opinions, personalities, and skills/abilities than oneself. Being able to adapt behavior based on the ways in which different people work.

Doing More With Less—Difficulties related to a lack of necessary resources including budgeting and staffing issues or the ability to perform despite these limitations.

As you can see, these challenges vary in scope. Some are challenges leaders at all levels of the organization face,⁷ but some are very unique to FTMs, ranging from working with others, working within a system of an organization, to a FTM's own personal improvement. **Three were mentioned by at least 40% of FTMs and will be our primary focus for the rest of this paper: Adjustment to People Management/ Displaying Authority (mentioned by 59.3% of FTMs); Developing Managerial & Personal Effectiveness (mentioned by 46.1% of FTMs); and Leading Team Achievement (mentioned by 43.4% of FTMs).**



Practical Tips and Application: What Can Be Done to Help FTMs Overcome These Challenges?

Now that you know the challenges FTMs have in their first leadership role, what can you do to help? First, the sidebar below describes a mindset that FTMs can adopt to be successful. Second, we provide insights into each of the top three challenges FTMs face, and offer help and advice to pass along to your FTMs so they can deal with or overcome those challenges.

The Mindset FTMs Need

Not only do you need to know the challenges FTMs have, you must also know the mindset they need in their new leadership role, and help them adopt it. The first white paper in the *Transitioning into Leadership* series, *"It's Not About Me. It's Me & You.": How Being Dumped Can Help First-Time Managers*, discussed the mindset FTMs need to be successful: **"It's not about me. It's me & you."** In short, a FTM's focus has to (1) *shift* and (2) **expand**. First, the focus must *shift*: a FTM's focus must move away from "me" and "my" abilities that got the promotion into management in the first place and shift towards the joy, satisfaction, and engagement that come with learning to be a leader and taking part in leadership development

opportunities. Second, a FTM's focus must **expand**: a focus on "you"—the people FTMs lead and serve—must now be included and integrated. When FTMs expand their focus on "you" they become accountable and responsible for the success of the people they lead and serve. So, help FTMs understand that to be successful, their mindset must change. Encourage them to put less emphasis on "me" and "my" abilities that set "me" apart from everyone. Help them *shift* their focus to being engaged in the process and finding their own joy in learning about leadership. Help them **expand** their focus to include "you"—the people FTMs lead and serve. **"It's not about me. It's me & you."**

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Adjustment to People Management/Displaying Authority

The challenge that was most-often cited by FTMs involved the difficulties associated with moving from a coworker to a superior role and establishing one's authority in the new managerial role. More than half of FTMs (59.3%) said this is one of their biggest challenges.

“As a new ‘boss’ of people in the office, I am still finding my way in a position of authority.”

Many FTMs struggle with the ability to exude a sense of authority over subordinates (some of whom were coworkers and friends before) and gain their respect. They want to be liked, but also want to be successful and productive. So they struggle with balancing established positive personal relationships with people, while being assertive and ensuring the work gets done by those same people.

“As a leader, one of the challenges is maintaining that friendly, personable approach while instilling a sense of leadership amongst peers, direct reports and other colleagues.”

This is the classic “We were peers and coworkers yesterday, and today I’m your boss” challenge, going from “BFF” (Best-Friends-Forever) to Boss. It’s all about the transition of that relationship where those used-to-be-coworkers, some they even bonded with as friends, working happily side-by-side with one another, are now “subordinates.” Yesterday, they may have been complaining about their boss together over their lunch break. Now, one of them is the boss, and that complaining is directed at the new boss, usually behind his or her back. How can a FTM who now manages former peers, and who in some instances are friends inside and outside the workplace, gain respect and authority while balancing the relationship they had before? Encourage your FTMs to:



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- **Be Clear**

Yes, FTMs can still be friends with the former coworkers who are now subordinates. But it's possible that FTMs may lose friends too, and they need to be aware of that. The FTM and former coworker-turned-subordinate each has to know, understand, and realize that the working relationship has changed. FTMs should therefore set clear expectations around the work and what is expected for all direct reports. Transparency makes life easier. If there are certain boundaries that need to be set for FTMs and their direct reports, make sure FTMs get them out in the open with the individual. And the earlier the better.

- **Be Fair**

Once there is clarity around expectations, FTMs have to be fair in their actions. Their friends have to know who is boss and that no preferential treatment will be given when it comes to bonuses, raises, promotions, support, and resources. And the other direct reports who may not have as close of a relationship have to know that as well. Leave the personal biases behind. FTMs should be fair in the way they give out rewards, time, and resources. If their friends deserve it, and it's documented, great. If they don't and they still get rewarded, that's when gossip, perceptions of unfairness, and all sorts of trouble will start.

- **Be Aware**

Help FTMs recognize that when they are the boss, people's eyes are always on them, whether they know it or not. People are always looking at their actions—what they are doing, and what they are not doing. Because FTMs know their friends more than other direct reports, they may be inadvertently giving them more time, more energy, and more support than others. FTMs have to attend to everyone, so give FTMs feedback on how much time and energy they are giving all their direct reports.

- **Be Proactive**

As soon as FTMs are promoted, make sure they get on the calendar of each of their direct reports to have an individual meeting that is all about the direct report. During that meeting, FTMs should find out what motivates each of their direct reports, what each likes about his or her work, how each likes to be led and whatever other questions or concerns each direct report has. Ensure that there is time for FTMs during those one-to-one meetings to also talk about their own personal vision for the group and how each direct report can be a helpful part of that vision.

Developing Managerial & Personal Effectiveness

With 46.1% of FTMs citing this as a challenge, developing managerial and personal effectiveness deals with the balance of being a productive worker and being a better leader. FTMs need to acquire or enhance management skills related to being a better leader while still honing their craft in their job as an employee.

“It can at times be a challenge both overseeing the staff and keeping my own work at a high level of quality.”

“I was recently promoted to manager of a larger number of employees in the same department. Although I have worked in this department, there are many facets of this department that I have to learn from scratch. I want to learn all aspects of this new position without coming across as ignorant.”



When FTMs get promoted from their individual contributor roles to managerial roles, many of them think they will drop the things that they used to do, and their job going forward is to solely lead others. What they fail to realize is that oftentimes, FTMs have to do the job of leading others on top of their own work as productive employees. They find out that leadership is not an “instead of” but an “add-on” to their work. They need help enhancing personal and managerial skills that will make them effective in both the realm of an employee (such as job skills specific to one’s industry or organization) and the realm of a leader (such as acquiring leadership and relationship skills). With this juggling of priorities and needing to enhance both their

“employee” and “leader” reputation, many FTMs feel overwhelmed. No wonder FTMs struggle. They need to do so much and need to learn so much. Yet, they feel as if they have no time to do all the things they need to do as both an employee and a leader.

Dr. Melissa Gratiyas, a work psychologist and consultant who has experience helping business people and managers be more effective and organized says that **“most front-line managers must achieve a balance between the workload on their own desk as well as leading the efforts of others. They share many of the same struggles as both executives and individual contributors—just combined.”**⁸ Truly, this is hard to balance. This FTM surely relates:

“I need to have more realistic expectations of my own time and productivity, allowing myself adequate preparation for meetings and reports and committing in a challenging, but honest fashion.”

And, when FTMs have difficulty managing their time, they tend to have difficulty managing their stress and their workload.

“[One of my biggest challenges is] the ability to cope with competing demands and execute enormous amounts of work efficiently and effectively.”



Help your FTMs manage their time and stress better with the tips Dr. Gratiias offers:

- **Set Goals**
Work closely with your FTMs to set their own specific and measurable goals. Ensure that their goals are balanced across their competing priorities.
- **Create a List**
Encourage your FTMs to maintain an overall list of responsibilities and active projects for their entire team. Such a list will help FTMs maintain focus on the bigger picture.
- **Plan Meetings**
Help your FTMs plan how often they need to meet one-on-one with their direct reports. In addition, talk to FTMs about the structure of those meetings, and any anticipated outcomes of those meetings. Help FTMs understand any expectations they or their direct reports have around holding regular check-in meetings—every month or two may be fine, but some direct reports may need more attention than others.
- **Use One Calendar**
Some use a calendar on their email system, some their electronic device, others use pencil and paper. The best advice you can give FTMs when it comes to their calendars, is to make sure they manage their time and tasks using only one calendar and one consolidated to-do list. Using multiple systems only fragments their focus.

Leading Team Achievement

Providing guidance to teams and leading the team particularly when directions, expectations, and goals are unclear, ranks number three in the challenges FTMs face (43.4%). The ability to set and adhere to a team's long-term goals as well as provide clarity among the team is part of this challenge. The ability to prioritize team tasks, identify where to focus efforts, and keeping the team prepared and working efficiently, along with the ability to address performance issues with team members that take the team off track, are all part of this challenge.

“[One of my biggest challenges is] finding the strengths and weaknesses in my team members. I'd like to be able to recognize the strengths in my team members and utilize those strengths while minimizing their weaknesses.”

“Teamwork is another challenge I struggle with. I get a sense of “Every Man for Himself” attitude in my group, with a reluctance to jump in and take co-ownership of projects/task.”

It's no coincidence that leading team achievement is one of the biggest challenges FTMs have; other CCL research on FTMs showed that leading team achievement is one of the biggest skill gaps FTMs have (highly important and relevant in their position, yet not highly skilled in doing it).⁹ Here are some valuable tips you can provide your FTMs to help them lead their teams more effectively.



- **DAC as a Framework**

Provide FTMs a framework for leading teams: DAC or Direction, Alignment, and Commitment.¹⁰ Make sure that FTMs provide direction (Is there agreement on the collective aim, mission, vision, or goal?), create alignment (Does each person know his or her own roles and responsibilities, and those of others on the team?), and maintain commitment (Is every single person dedicated to and passionate about the work?) for their teams.

- **Say the Word “Together” a Lot¹¹**

Think about the teams you are in. Usually, every single person on the team, including you, is working as an individual, alone on a task. Rarely are you working side-by-side with other team members the whole time. Research by Carr and Walton¹² can help FTMs lead their teams better given this work setting. In their research, Carr and Walton had two types of teams. In the first type of team, each person on the team heard the word “together” as in “you will be working together on a project” (even though in reality, each person worked on the task alone, like many of us do at work). The second type of team never heard the word “together” in directions. What they found was

that people who worked in teams that heard the word “together” actually worked longer, solved more problems correctly, remembered things better, felt less tired by the task, and found the work more interesting than teams who did not hear the word “together.” Hearing the word “together” makes us feel connected and makes us feel like we are not alone. FTMs would do well if they say the word “together” more frequently when communicating with their teams, even if they are not going to be working literally together side-by-side.

- **Don't Let Conflicts Spread**

We are human, and as humans form teams, it is only natural that conflict will arise. If an obvious conflict is ignored or unresolved, the team will become disengaged. Stanford Professor Lindred Greer gives some great advice¹³ that FTMs could follow to avoid conflicts spreading through a team. In particular: encourage your FTMs to keep an eye on conflicts and disagreements; make sure they understand what the real issue is before addressing it; and strongly suggest that your FTMs do their very best to be an unbiased, neutral party.

Ways Organizations Can Sustain Success

So far, our research has provided you the top challenges FTMs have, and we have given some helpful tips you can pass on to your FTMs to help them overcome those challenges. But what can organizations do as an institution to help FTMs and strengthen the leadership pipeline? What follows are three key tactics.

- **Design Developmental Initiatives Around Challenges Specific to FTMs**

Knowing the challenges FTMs face can be the catalyst for helping them. Based on our work at CCL¹⁷ and what we see time and time again with our clients, developmental initiatives are more effective if they are in line with the challenges leaders face. Managers have low satisfaction with training programs or initiatives if they believe the content is useless to them, if they don't connect with the content, or if their expectations that the content will help them deal with their current challenges aren't met. In fact, Cindy McCauley of CCL suggests that one of the key principles to help accelerate leader development is customization, or "being deliberate about providing experiences tailored to address the individuals' most pressing development needs, or to help them meet the role demands they are facing or will soon face."¹⁸ So, a key recommendation for organizations to strengthen their leadership pipeline would be to design training and developmental initiatives around the key challenges FTMs specifically face. Use the information provided in this white paper to your advantage to understand what challenges FTMs face. Or, ask FTMs personally and individually in your own organization, to find out the exact challenges they face in your organization. Then, design programs and initiatives that are customized to help them with those specific challenges.

- **Use FTM Circles**

Have FTMs meet in groups led by mentors. Professors Wendy Murphy and Kathy Kram call these "mentoring circles"¹⁹ where one to three mentors are teamed with four to eight mentees. They would be able to share stories of success or failure, share what they have learned from experience, and be a support system. If there is a cadre of willing mentors (maybe successful leaders in the organization who FTMs can learn from) able to lead those circles, great. Even if there aren't formal "mentors" at the head of each of these circles, giving time and space for FTMs to get together to

have formal or informal FTM circles and act as peer mentors to each other can go a long way in making them feel supported and valued. This leads to the final point.

- **Tell FTMs They Are Not Alone and Show It**

They may feel alone, particularly when the statistics say that a majority of FTMs aren't getting any help or development once they get into their first managerial role. If your organization is unable to provide training and development to FTMs due to time or money constraints, one easy (and oftentimes overlooked) way to help FTMs (and any employee in general) not feel so alone is to tell them they are supported, and show it too. Our research at CCL shows that frontline leaders at the entry- and first-levels of management need, and positively respond to, support from both their own boss and their organization.²⁰ "Support helps people handle the struggle and pain of developing. It helps them bear the weight of the experience and maintain a positive view of themselves as capable, worthy, valuable people who can learn and thereby grow."²¹ So, ensure that FTMs are heard when they have problems or suggestions. Communicate with them and provide them feedback on how they are doing. Let FTMs know they are doing important work. Provide formal recognition of the great work they are doing. This type of support can help FTMs feel not so alone. In fact, it may have longer-term benefits: our research at CCL shows that when people feel support from their supervisors and organization, they have higher job satisfaction, higher commitment to the organization, and are less likely to want to leave their organization.²⁰ That's less money that is spent on disengaged employees. That's less money wasted in hiring new employees to replace old ones who left because they didn't feel supported. That's more money used to develop and strengthen your current leadership pipeline. Supporting employees can truly impact any organization's leadership pipeline and bottom line.



Conclusion

To paraphrase Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the ultimate measure of a person is not where he or she stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he or she stands at times of challenge. FTMs face many challenges as soon as they transition from individual contributor to manager and leader of others. Our research has provided the 12 challenges FTMs most often face. Unfortunately, many FTMs are left struggling with no help to overcome these challenges. The best thing you can do for your FTMs is to provide support and give them training and developmental initiatives that are geared specifically to deal with their exact challenges. Doing so will help them become better leaders in their current position and will strengthen your own organization's leadership pipeline.

About the Research

Data used for this white paper is from participants of the Maximizing Your Leadership Potential (MLP) Program of the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL®) between May 2012 and December 2013. As part of their “pre-work” before coming to their respective leadership development program, participants filled out several assessment and background biographical forms. Part of this pre-work asked the participants to answer the following open-ended question: “What are the three most critical leadership challenges you are currently facing?” Participants used their own words to explain their challenges and could use as few or as many words as they wished, with a maximum of 500 characters for each challenge. Our final sample consisted of 664 practicing managers who participated in MLP

About the Maximizing Your Leadership Potential Program

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.

programs offered in Greensboro, North Carolina, San Diego, California, and Brussels, Belgium. Of the 664 MLP participants, 297 said they were managing for the first time in their lives, and of those, 295 had at least one challenge that they wrote. These 295 were the FTMs that were the focus of this study. They averaged 36.59 years of age ($SD = 7.82$), were majority male (55.6%), mainly from the United States (65.8%), and well-educated (more than 80% had at least a college education). Most (72.6%) worked in the business sector from several diverse industries (e.g., computer software & services; consumer products; energy; food, beverage, tobacco; insurance; manufacturing; pharmaceuticals).

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

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- The challenges of middle-to-upper-middle level managers around the world: Gentry, W. A., Eckert, R. H., Stawiski, S. A., & Zhao, S. (2013). *The challenges leaders face around the world: More similar than different*. [White Paper]. Greensboro, NC: Center for Creative Leadership. <http://www.ccl.org/leadership/pdf/research/ChallengesLeadersFace.pdf>
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¹⁰ See the CCL white paper *Making Leadership Happen* by Cynthia McCauley for more details. <http://www.ccl.org/leadership/pdf/research/MakingLeadershipHappen.pdf>

¹¹ See Heidi Grant Halvorson’s blog: <http://blogs.hbr.org/2014/08/managers-can-motivate-employees-with-one-word/>

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¹⁵ For help in giving feedback, see the following CCL resources:

- A blog by Shera Clark entitled “Feedback You Can Fathom” <http://www.leadingeffectively.com/feedback-you-can-fathom/>
- Buron, R. J., & McDonald-Mann, D. (1999). *Giving feedback to subordinates*. Greensboro, NC: CCL Press.
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¹⁷ Gentry, W. A., Eckert, R., Munusamy, V. P., Stawiski, S. A., & Martin, J. (2014). The needs of participants in leadership development programs: A qualitative and quantitative, cross-country investigation. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 21, 83-101.

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