

**Eighty-Eight
Assignments for
Development
in Place**

**Michael M. Lombardo
Robert W. Eichinger**

CENTER FOR CREATIVE LEADERSHIP

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Greensboro, North Carolina

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How to Use This Article

This article is intended as a tool for managers and professionals at all levels and for human resources professionals. Its purpose is to help you add developmental assignments to current jobs. As implied by the title, the focus is on what can be done without moving people into new jobs, on developmental options that can be exercised in existing jobs to more systematically develop people by providing variety in leadership challenge and help in learning from these challenges.

The article will offer 88 developmental experiences that can be added to existing jobs. After reading this, you will have a basis for matching the developmental needs of subordinates to the experiences most likely to address those needs. You will also be able to give subordinate managers the information they need to take charge of their own development more systematically.

As a manager responsible for the development of subordinates, this article will help you take a look at your own job and perhaps find pieces of it that are no longer developmental for you but which might be developmental for one or more of your subordinates. Handing off these parts of your job can lead to development for your subordinates and free you to enhance your own development as well.

The article is organized in five major sections:

Section	Pages	Contents
1	1-3	Background: Discussion of the experiences that our research found to be most developmental to managers and what can be learned from these experiences.
2	3-5	Discussion of the eleven challenges common to developmental experiences.
3	5-12	Discussion of options for development in place, including matrix of 88 such options and the likely developmental aspects of each.
4	13-22	Considerations in setting up a system for development in place.
5	23-28	How to help managers get the most out of development in place.

Background: Experiences That Develop Managers and What Makes Them Developmental

The Center for Creative Leadership's continuing studies[†] of executive growth and development have confirmed and extended the adage that experience is the best teacher.

In these studies we found that variety in leadership challenges—certain jobs, exceptional other people (overwhelmingly bosses), coping with our mistakes, enduring hardships, and coursework at pivotal moments—all contribute to the building and seasoning of managers.

Specific experiences teach specific lessons necessary for success. But it is critical, as T. S. Eliot said, not to “. . . have the experience, and miss the meaning.” Managers we studied who went on to become effective executives not only had the experiences but learned lessons from them. Learning was not automatic, only made possible by the encountering of certain challenges.

Armed with this knowledge, development can certainly be a more systematic effort than it has been in the past. By exposing young managers to developmental jobs and developmental bosses, and by helping them become effective learners, we can increase our pool of potential leadership talent for the future and provide more meaningful work for managers.

Several problems get in the way, however the most obvious is that American organizations are hardly in a boom era. Since 1980 the *Fortune* 500 has eliminated 2.8 million jobs, 30 million people have been displaced in restructurings, and entire levels of organizations have disappeared overnight (Peters, 1987).

With the rapid increase of dual-career couples and single heads of households, a trend line projected to rise further beyond the year 2000, many managers are refusing geographic moves. A recent study found that 60% of relocation requests were refused. A human resources director told us the tale of asking nine managers to take a plum developmental assignment in France before he got a taker. With organizations slimming down, the problem of creating challenging assignments is complicated by the fact that there are now fewer developmental jobs. In addition, many companies have slowed moving people around due to cost. What is needed is more than a recounting of the types of assignments that are developmental. What is needed is help with development in place so that challenge and growth can be added to virtually *all* managerial and physical jobs.

[†] See References.

This is exactly what this article aims to do. Before we discuss development in place, however, we will take a few pages to look at what makes certain kinds of assignments developmental. Then we will turn to the question of how developmental challenge can be provided in existing jobs.

There are five broad categories of experience that executives generally cite as being potentially developmental:

- (1) **Challenging jobs**, because they teach about the subtleties of leadership—starting up or fixing troubled operations, expanding large operations, working on time-limited projects from crises to systems installations. These represent what leaders do. Such jobs teach how to cope with pressure, learn quickly, or deal with problem subordinates. In absolute terms, challenging assignments are the best teacher: They are most likely to be remembered as developmental, and can teach both the greatest variety and the largest number of lessons.
- (2) **Other people, mostly bosses**, because they serve as models of values. Exceptional people seemed to create a punctuation mark for executives, either by representing what to be or do, or what not to be or do. Whether by serving as a model of integrity or acumen, poor ethics or avarice, certain bosses exemplify how values play out in management settings.
- (3) **Hardships**, because they tell us something about our limits. In our research, managers told of making mistakes, getting stuck in dead-end jobs, having to fire people, and enduring the traumas of life. These events often caused managers to look inward and reflect on their humanity, their resilience, and their flaws.
- (4) **Coursework**, because it can serve as a powerful comparison point, a chance to build self-confidence by sizing oneself against managers from other firms. Executives spoke of coursework as a kind of forum for trading tips, picking different problem-solving methods, and comparing themselves with others.
- (5) **Off-the-job experiences**, usually relating to community services. Such experiences were often primers in persuasion.

The overall benefit of experience seems to be that each kind can teach something uniquely. Learning from the variety of experience can lead, not to the perfection of becoming a manager for all situations, but to becoming a manager with a sense of balance. The confidence that is often built through coping with challenging job assignments may lead to arrogance unless tempered by a sense of one's own foibles and limits. Toughness—doing what has to be done for the business in spite of the human cost—needs to be balanced by sensitivity to others. Managers must lead and empower others to lead as well.

This recognition of opposites and paradox is hardly guaranteed by experience, only made possible. The implicit model for effectiveness that emerged from our research is that diversity in experiences and striving to learn from experience can lead to the personal balance required to be a leader.

The flip side of the argument also holds: Impoverished experience and/or failure to learn from it is related to derailment, to having one's career involuntarily stalled through demotion, plateauing early, or being fired.

So experience matters greatly for effectiveness in management, but what is it about experience that makes it developmental?

Eleven Challenges Common to Developmental Experience

In our research, not just any type of experience was recalled as having been developmental. Job changes involving the same people, or similar tasks, or indefinite time frames were rarely cited. Here are the 11 most commonly cited challenges, in rough order of how often they were mentioned. Based on this research, we have concluded that for an experience to be developmental, 5 or more of these imbedded challenges are usually present.

Eleven Developmental Challenges

1. *Success and failure are both possible and will be obvious to others* (some visible score or end point will tell everyone how things went). Most learning occurs of necessity; and when managers believe that the chance of failure is significant, they are more driven to learn. Challenges ranging from running the company picnic, to planning a new site, to handling a negotiation, offer the chance of success or failure.

2. *Requires aggressive individual, “take charge” leadership.* This means there is a need to create visions for change, focus on mutual expectations, and learn quickly. Stand-alone assignments require managers to be individually accountable, not just implementers or part of a team. Examples include hiring a secretarial pool or dealing with a business crisis.
3. *Involves working with new people, a lot of people, or both.* Many executives in our study reported developing an understanding of others from working with unusual groups—foreign governments, unions, multi-functional task forces, or problem subordinates.
4. *Creates additional personal pressure,* such as that caused by tough deadlines, high stakes, large scope/scale to job, heavy travel or longer hours, highly charged task. Such pressure creates a tension between where managers are and where they’d like to be, which increases the probability of learning.
5. *Requires influencing people, activities, and factors over which the manager has no direct authority or control,* including such things as having superiors besides your boss, or learning to exercise lateral influence with peers and outside parties. This challenge tests and develops negotiation skills. Many projects, off-the-job experiences, and negotiations feature this challenge.
6. *Involves high variety,* including factors such as working at a hectic pace, needing to get large amounts of information orally, coping with ambiguity and change, encountering uncontrollable events, and managing contradiction and paradox. New situations with which the manager is unfamiliar and doesn’t know what to do, such as crises, building a new team, or strategic assignments, can help develop more comfort with ambiguity and the ability to juggle multiple problems.
7. *Will be closely watched by people whose opinions count,* such as the boss, higher management, or “outsiders.” Important projects, crises, and deadline situations are often closely monitored. Such situations can develop managers’ political skills.

8. *Requires building a team, starting something from scratch, or fixing or turning around a team or an operation or project in trouble.* This includes features such as downsizing, restructuring, layoffs, subordinate issues/problems, a poor-performing unit, and assessing people. Such challenges are commonly demanded in middle- and upper-level leadership jobs and require a broad array of management skills, especially resourcefulness.
9. *Has a major strategic component and is intellectually challenging.* Many staff assignments and major project assignments help enhance the ability to think strategically and grapple with ill-defined, murky areas.
10. *Involves interacting with an especially good, or bad, boss.* Bosses play significant roles in demonstrating what to do (or what not to do) and provide the nearest examples of what values the organization really rewards or punishes. Having variety in bosses helps managers get a stronger sense of how to put their own values into action so they can be more effective managers.
11. *Something important is missing,* including things such as top management support, alignment with strategy, key skills, technical knowledge, or credentials and credibility. The absence of such key elements in an assignment practically compels a manager to learn. When encountered for the first time, many assignments feature a crucial “missing piece.”

Assignments for Development in Place

It is not necessary to change someone’s job to provide many of these challenges, although job change is the best method. Adding these challenges to a manager’s current job creates new challenges and gives the incumbent a “new job” of sorts.

On the following pages are 88 options for development in place. These are divided into five categories according to the general type of assignment, as described below.

- A. **Small projects and start-ups**, which emphasize persuasion, learning new content quickly, working under time pressure, and dealing with groups of people not worked with before. Such assignments may or may not emphasize individual leadership, depending on whether or not the manager is in charge. Tim Hall found in his work with an engineering organization that “plateaued project engineers reported more recognition, more challenge, more psychological success, and more job involvement than their non-plateaued counterparts in technical and administrative areas” (Hall, 1988). This was because the work of the plateaued engineers was broader, more applied, and every project was new and demanded learning. Projects and start-ups which involve a new task, a start-to-finish mandate, and end-result accountability can be powerful experiences. The executives we studied recalled projects as demanding that they learn new content quickly by relying on other people and by appreciating the perspectives of other people. They reported similar benefits from small start-ups, with the added bonus of being held personally accountable.
- B. **Small scope jumps and fix-its**, which emphasize team-building, individual responsibility, dealing with the boss, development of subordinates, and time pressure. Seasoned executives rarely talk about team-building in an abstract sense. They specify what kind of situation a team must be built in. Are subordinates green, balky, competent, not competent, former peers? Is the manager an expert or not? Are subordinates experts or not? Are business conditions expanding, troubled, static? Each challenge has a different timbre to it—both in the variety of issues a manager must deal with and in the progression of one’s responsibilities. In the project and start-up category, managers may or may not be in charge, but in this second category, they must be in charge for significant challenge to occur. Here they are in charge of people for a short period of time or are responsible for dealing with a specific crisis or problem (an “undoable” project, outplacement, cost-cutting) where high conflict is likely.
- So although similar in nature to the first category, this category emphasizes dealing with emotionally charged situations where motivating and developing others is often required.
- C. **Small strategic assignments**, which emphasize intellectual pressure, influence skills, and a lack of credibility in some area. In this

category, managers may or may not be closely watched, depending on the assignment. The executives we studied told us that such assignments often shocked them out of a parochial point of view by requiring them to go from an operational to a strategic perspective, from concrete to abstract, or from a present to a future orientation.

Such assignments were also reported as a prime source of learning about coping with ambiguous, uncertain situations in which there is little control and few rules. Having to report on findings and attempting to influence higher level managers should be a feature of such assignments.

- D. **Coursework and coaching assignments**, which emphasize missing something one needs to know and intellectual pressure, either of which can lead to heightened self-awareness. Executives in our study recalled how difficult it was to teach or coach others. If they were expert in the area, the difficulty often lay in explaining what had become intuitive for them. If they were not expert (in designing a course, for example), they were likely to feel strong intellectual pressure. From either circumstance, a likely benefit was heightened awareness of what they valued, how they thought, how they responded to intellectual pressure.

When they were on the other side of the situation, similar benefits could accrue. When they attended courses aimed at self-awareness or new content, or when they worked with a higher level manager who was particularly good (or bad) at something, the executives we studied reported reflecting on their values and learning patterns through their exposure to powerful models. These models might be instructors, other participants, a formal model (of problem solving, for example), or a higher level manager who exemplified what to do or what not to do.

Any of these could trigger a look within—an examination of how they did things and what they valued.

- E. **Activities away from work**. Development certainly doesn't have to occur on the job. Executives in our study mentioned volunteer work, community service, professional organizations, and coaching children's sports. Any of these tend to emphasize individual leadership and working with new people; they may also have elements of learning to influence and persuade.

EIGHTY-EIGHT ASSIGNMENTS FOR DEVELOPMENT IN PLACE

Likely Developmental Aspects

	Success/Failure	Individual Lead	New People	Pressure	Influence	High Diversity	Closely Watched	Challenge	Strategic	Boss	Missing Something
A. Small Projects and Start-ups (see page 6 for general description)											
1. Task force on a pressing business problem	x		x	x	x		x		x		x
2. Plan a new site	x	x	x	x							
3. Plan an off-site meeting, conference, convention	x		x	x							
4. Handle a negotiation with a customer	x	x		x	x						x
5. Install a new system	x	x	x	x	x		x				x
6. Work with a plant shut down crew	x	x	x	x			x	x			x
7. Integrate systems across units	x	x	x	x			x				x
8. Supervise product, program, equipment, or systems purchase	x	x		x	x	x				x	x
9. Supervise liquidation of product, program, equipment, or system	x	x		x	x	x				x	x
10. Present proposal report to top management	x		x	x	x		x		x	x	
11. Go off-site to troubleshoot problems (deal with dissatisfied customer)	x	x	x	x	x	x		x			x
12. Go to campus as recruiter			x		x	x					x
13. Supervise a study team		x	x		x						
14. Run company picnic	x	x		x	x	x					
15. Start up something small (e.g., hire a secretarial pool)	x	x	x	x		x		x		x	x
16. Run a task force on a business problem	x	x	x	x	x	x	x				x
17. Business trip to foreign country			x		x	x					x
18. Lobby for the organization			x	x	x	x					x
19. Supervise furnishing of offices	x		x		x	x	x				

EIGHTY-EIGHT ASSIGNMENTS FOR DEVELOPMENT IN PLACE (cont.)

Likely Developmental Aspects

A. Small Projects and Start-ups
(cont.)

- 20. Supervise assigning office space
- 21. Make speeches for organization
- 22. Write PR releases
- 23. Serve at booth at trade show
- 24. Work with credit union board or committee
- 25. Be a loaned executive
- 26. Serve on new project/product review committee
- 27. Work short periods in other units
- 28. Do a project with another function
- 29. Manage renovation project
- 30. Launch new product/program
- 31. Use seed budget on personal idea/project
- 32. Follow a new product/system through entire cycle
- 33. Represent concerns of non-exempt employees to higher management
- 34. Assign project with tight deadline
- 35. Manage the visit of a VIP
- 36. Serve on a junior board

B. Small Scope Jumps and Fix-its
(see page 6 for general description)

- 37. Create symbol/rallying cry for change and implementation

	Success/Failure	Individual Lead	New People	Pressure	Influence	High Diversity	Closely Watched	Challenge	Strategic	Boss	Missing Something
	x		x		x	x	x				
	x		x	x	x						x
	x		x		x						
			x		x						
			x		x						
	x	x	x	x	x	x					
			x		x	x	x		x		x
			x	x	x	x					x
			x	x	x	x					x
	x	x	x	x	x	x					
			x	x	x	x			x		
	x	x	x	x		x	x			x	
	x		x	x		x	x			x	
			x	x	x	x			x		x
	x	x			x						

EIGHTY-EIGHT ASSIGNMENTS FOR DEVELOPMENT IN PLACE (cont.)

Likely Developmental Aspects

	Success/Failure	Individual Lead	New People	Pressure	Influence	High Diversity	Closely Watched	Challenge	Strategic	Boss	Missing Something
B. Small Scope Jumps and Fix-its (cont.)											
38. Manage ad hoc group of inexperienced people	x	x		x		x	x	x		x	x
39. Manage ad hoc group of balky people	x	x		x		x	x	x		x	x
40. Manage ad hoc group of low competence people	x	x		x		x	x	x		x	x
41. Manage ad hoc group of former peers	x	x		x		x	x	x		x	x
42. Manage ad hoc group—person is expert, people are not	x	x		x		x	x	x		x	
43. Manage ad hoc group—people are expert, person is not	x	x		x		x	x	x		x	x
44. Manage ad hoc group during a fix-it	x	x		x		x	x	x		x	x
45. Manage ad hoc group in a static operation	x	x		x		x	x	x		x	x
46. Manage ad hoc group in a rapidly expanding operation	x	x		x		x	x	x		x	x
47. Size up who to keep and who to let go	x	x									x
48. Deal with a business crisis	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x
49. Assign “undoable” project (last person who tried it failed)	x	x		x	x	x	x	x		x	x
50. Supervise outplacement	x	x		x		x	x	x		x	
51. Supervise cost-cutting	x	x		x	x	x	x	x		x	
52. Design new, simpler effectiveness measures	x	x			x		x	x			x
53. Assign to work on something they hate to do	x	x		x		x	x	x		x	x
54. Resolve conflict among warring subordinates	x	x		x		x		x			x
55. Make peace with an enemy	x	x		x	x	x		x			x

EIGHTY-EIGHT ASSIGNMENTS FOR DEVELOPMENT IN PLACE (cont.)

Likely Developmental Aspects

C. Small Strategic Assignments

(see page for 6 general description)

- 56. Summarize new trend/technique; present to others
- 57. Write a proposal for a new system, product, etc.
- 58. Spend a week with customers/ write report
- 59. Do a competitive analysis
- 60. Write a speech for someone higher in organization
- 61. Write up policy statement
- 62. Study customer needs
- 63. Postmortem on failed project
- 64. Do a problem prevention analysis
- 65. Study innovation of customers/ competitors
- 66. Interview outsiders on their view of the organization
- 67. Evaluate impact of training
- 68. Construct a success/derailment profile
- 69. Write up contingency scenario
- 70. Work on affirmative action planning

D. Coursework/Coaching Assignments

(see page 7 for general description)

- 71. Teach a course or workshop

	Success/Failure	Individual Lead	New People	Pressure	Influence	High Diversity	Closely Watched	Challenge	Strategic	Boss	Missing Something
	x			x	x				x		x
	x			x	x				x		x
	x		x	x	x				x		x
	x			x	x				x		x
	x			x	x				x		x
	x			x	x				x		x
	x		x	x	x				x		x
	x		x	x	x				x		x
	x		x	x	x				x		x
	x		x	x	x				x		x
	x		x	x	x				x		x
	x		x	x	x				x		x
	x	x	x	x	x						x

EIGHTY-EIGHT ASSIGNMENTS FOR DEVELOPMENT IN PLACE (cont.)

Likely Developmental Aspects

D. Coursework/Coaching Assignments (cont.)

- 72. Teach someone how to do something they are not expert in
- 73. Teach someone how to do something they're expert in
- 74. Design training course
- 75. Do a self-study project
- 76. Attend self-awareness course
- 77. Train as an assessor in assessment center
- 78. Spend a day with an expert on some job aspect
- 79. Study new technical area
- 80. Study history/draw business parallels
- 81. Assign to work with higher manager who is particularly good or bad at something

E. Off-Job Activities

(see page 7 for general description)

- 82. Become active in a professional organization
- 83. Serve with a community agency
- 84. Become active in a volunteer organization
- 85. Join a community board
- 86. Act as a consultant on a problem/issue outside job
- 87. Coach children's sports
- 88. Work with a charitable organization

	Success/Failure	Individual Lead	New People	Pressure	Influence	High Diversity	Closely Watched	Challenge	Strategic	Boss	Missing Something
				x							x
				x							x
	x	x	x	x							x
				x							
			x	x							
			x	x							x
			x	x							x
				x							
	x			x						x	x
		x	x		x						
		x	x		x						
		x	x		x						
		x	x		x						
	x	x	x		x			x			
		x	x		x						

Setting Up a System for Development in Place

Once developmental assignments have been worked out, there needs to be some method for making specific assignments to specific managers. There also needs to be some way of helping managers learn the most from their developmental assignments and a way to get feedback to them on how effectively they are learning.

Which Assignments for Which People?

Numerous strategies are available. First, armed with this information, many managers will voluntarily add developmental challenges to their present jobs. They will assess themselves in accordance with what they've done and not done, where they are proficient and where not so proficient.

Second, a general strategy can be followed of exposing early career managers over a period of time to one or two assignments in each of the five areas. More than one in each appropriate category may be advisable because a small project and a small start-up are somewhat different experiences, although for simplicity they are grouped in the same category. Such a strategy allows for a natural building of variety in experience and a progression in responsibilities.

Third, a job assignment which naturally arises through the course of work can be used as a developmental experience. For example, a financial task force requires participation of a staff member. Using the 11 developmental challenges on pages 3-5, the task force can be coded as to its developmental potential, or by referring to pages 6-7 the manager can decide which type of development in place assignment it is (i.e., a project).

Since such projects usually demand learning quickly by relying on other people, persuasion, working under time pressure and dealing with groups not dealt with before, the manager can then ask which of his or her subordinates could benefit most from this assignment. Who has never worked on a short-term project? Who most needs to learn to be a quick study, improve persuasiveness, or learn to deal with pressure better?

Fourth, a strategy of targeted development can be followed where a specific need is addressed by one assignment or a series of assignments. Following are two charts to help target development. The left column of each chart lists the developmental needs (first chart) or the derailment factors (second chart) identified in CCL's studies of learning from experience. The middle column lists assignments for development in place to address the needs. The right column lists some of the 88 assignments by number.

These charts have several general uses: one is to locate multiple assignments in order to build long-term competency for a group of people low in strategic skills, for example; another is to custom-design developmental assignments when none of the 88 development-in-place assignments are currently available or are not appropriate. In this use, managers should refer to the charts to detail what needs to be developed (e.g., strategic skills) and look at the description of strategic assignments on page 6 and the examples on page 11. In this example, what is needed is an assignment which emphasizes intellectual pressure, influence skills with higher management, and missing a needed skill or knowledge. The manager should then ask what important business area or nagging problem could stand a fresh look. For example, he or she might assign one or more people to look into quality problems in their unit, see what other companies are doing, consult with experts, and present recommendations to higher management.

Finally, perhaps the most common use of the following charts is to match assignments with an individual's developmental need or to build a strength in a new area. For example, a person who doesn't sell up well or who has never had to sell an idea to higher management might be assigned to represent concerns of non-exempt employees to higher management (33), serve on a junior board (36), or write up a policy statement for approval (60).

I. Matching Needs to Development in Place Assignments: Skills and Perspectives

Need	Recommendation	Some Suggested Assignments
1. Resourcefulness		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has trouble coping with ambiguity, unstructured problems 	Start-ups/projects Fix-its/scopes Strategy	1, 2, 5, 7, 15, 16, 30 42, 43, 48, 49 56-59, 67, 69
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doesn't sell up well 	Projects requiring presentation Coaching	10, 33, 36, 60
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has trouble setting up systems 	Small projects Systems installation	3, 14, 19, 29 5, 7, 8, 11
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parochial (non-strategic) 	Multi-unit projects Switch to line or staff project	1, 7, 8, 9, 16, 32 56-70
2. Doing Whatever It Takes		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lacks perseverance 	Assign to do something they hate to do Assignment with tight deadline Confront conflicts	47-50, 53-55 1-11, 19-20, 29, 34, 48 4, 11, 19, 20, 33, 39, 44
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doesn't understand likes/dislikes/not particularly open to "new" learning 	Coursework/coaching Give a task which is too large to handle alone or where their expertise is limited	75-77, 81 16, 30, 37-46, 48
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lacks self-confidence/ doesn't take charge willingly 	Coursework/coaching Start-ups/team-building situations Off-job	75,77, 81 1, 2, 5, 7, 15, 16, 30, 38-46 85-87
3. Quick Study		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Studies new topics to death 	Presentations requiring "new" information Project with tight deadline Coaching	10, 33, 36, 39 1-10 81

I. Matching Needs to Development in Place Assignments: Skills and Perspectives (cont.)

Need	Recommendation	Some Suggested Assignments
3. Quick Study (cont.)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flounders due to lack of technical/functional expertise 	Multi-unit project with experts	1, 27, 28, 43
	Switch to line or staff project with experts	56-70
	Study combined with work project	78-80
	Have the person study how he or she can learn new areas quickly	71-74
	Attend professional meetings on unfamiliar topics	82
4. Decisiveness		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lacks decisiveness • Too quick 	Assignment with deadline	4, 8, 9, 11, 14, 34
	Assignment featuring persuasion Off-job	10, 12, 17, 18, 21-25, 33, 35, 36, 43, 57, 60 82-88
5. Leading Subordinates		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor at delegating, motivating 	Various team-building situations	16, 28, 37-46, 87
	Coaching	81
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor at developing 	Give a task that is too large to do alone	16, 30, 37-46, 48
6. Setting a Developmental Climate		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too controlling/over manages 	Various team-building situations	16, 28, 37-46, 87
	Coaching	81
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doesn't lead by example 	Give a task that is too large to do alone	16, 30, 37-46, 48

**I. Matching Needs to Development in Place Assignments:
Skills and Perspectives (cont.)**

Need	Recommendation	Some Suggested Assignments
7. Confronting Problem Subordinates		
• Procrastinates/smoothes over problems	Downsizing/cutback/shutdown	6, 9, 47-51, 63-64
• Acts too abruptly	Inheriting a problem subordinate or group	38-44, 47, 54, 55
8. Team Orientation		
• Tries to do it all alone	Give a task too large to handle alone Various team-building situations	16, 30, 37-46, 48 16, 28, 37-46, 87
• Doesn't promote team spirit	Off-job	83-84, 86-87
9. Hiring Talented Staff		
• Doesn't attract good people	Staff a task force or start-up	16, 30, 37-46
• Hires in own image	Learn what to look for in people	12, 47, 50, 68, 71, 74
10. Building and Mending Relationships		
• Poor negotiator	Assignment with deadline	4, 8, 9, 11, 14, 34
• Lacks understanding of others	Project (e.g., represent customer concerns to top management) Coursework combined with work assignment Deal with new group	10-12, 17, 18, 23-25, 33, 36, 54, 55, 58, 62, 65 71, 72, 74-77 38-46, 83-88
• Problems with peers	Assignment requiring peer persuasion Off-job	1, 5, 7, 16, 19, 20, 26-30 82-88

I. Matching Needs to Development in Place Assignments: Skills and Perspectives (cont.)

Need	Recommendation	Some Suggested Assignments
11. Compassion and Sensitivity		
• Overly critical of mistakes	Project where they lack expertise	43, 49, 53
• Impersonal	Coaching/coursework Off-job	72, 75-77, 81 83, 84, 87, 88
• Doesn't listen well	Assign "undoable" project Confront conflicts Assign to develop new group	47-50, 53-55 4, 11, 19, 20, 33 38-46
12. Straightforwardness and Composure		
• Tells people what they want to hear	Coaching/coursework	72, 75-77, 81
• Becomes cynical/blames others	Make individual accountable in difficult situations	2, 5, 15, 16, 29-31, 38-40, 44, 48-49, 53-55
13. Balance Between Personal Life and Work		
• Overdoes work	Off-job Coursework	83-85, 87-88 75-76
• Has conflicts between the two	Counsel employees with personal or work problems	33, 40, 42, 54, 71
14. Self-awareness		
• Doesn't seek feedback/admit mistakes easily	Coursework/coaching	75-77, 81
• Doesn't know strengths/weaknesses	Assign "undoable" project or against a specific skills deficiency	49, 53, 55
15. Putting People at Ease		
• Distant/in a hurry	Work with new groups	1, 4, 5, 7, 38-46, 83-88
• Lack of humor	Coursework	75-77

**I. Matching Needs to Development in Place Assignments:
Skills and Perspectives (cont.)**

Need	Recommendation	Some Suggested Assignments
16. Acting with Flexibility		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Driven to be one way or the other (e.g., overly tough, too individually-oriented, too self-confident)	Coaching/coursework Make individual accountable in difficult situations	75-77, 81 2, 5, 15, 16, 29-31, 38-46, 48-49

II. Matching Needs to Development in Place Assignments: Derailment Factors

Need	Recommendation	Some Suggested Assignments
1. Problems with Interpersonal Relationships		
• Insensitivity	Project where they lack expertise	43, 49, 53
	Coaching/coursework	72, 75-77, 81
	Off-job	83, 84, 87, 88
	Assign “undoable” project	47-50, 53-55
	Confront conflicts	4, 11, 19, 20, 33
Assign to develop new group	38-46	
• Overambition	Make individual accountable in difficult situations	2, 5, 15, 16, 29-31, 38-40, 44, 48-49, 53-55
2. Problems with Molding a Staff		
• Poor at developing	Various team-building situations	16, 28, 37-46, 87
	Coaching	81
• Overmanages	Give a task that is too large to do alone	16, 30, 37-46, 48
• Procrastinates	Downsizing/cutback/shutdown	6, 9, 47-51, 63-64
• Acts too abruptly	Inheriting a problem subordinate or group	38-44, 47, 54, 55
• Doesn’t promote team spirit	Off-job	83-84, 86-87
• Doesn’t attract good people	Staff a task force or start-up	16, 30, 37-46
• Hires in own image	Learn what to look for in people	12, 47, 50, 68, 71, 74
3. Difficulty in Making Strategic Transitions		
• Has trouble coping with ambiguity, unstructured problems	Start-ups/projects	1, 2, 5, 7, 15, 16, 30
	Fix-its/scopes	42, 43, 48, 49
	Strategy	56-59, 67, 69

II. Matching Needs to Development in Place Assignments: Derailment Factors (cont.)

Need	Recommendation	Some Suggested Assignments
3. Difficulty in Making Strategic Transitions (cont.)		
• Has trouble setting up systems	Small projects	3, 14, 19, 29
	Systems installation	5, 7, 8, 11
• Parochial (non-strategic)	Multi-unit projects	1, 7, 8, 9, 16, 32
	Switch to line or staff project	56-70
• Studies new topics to death	Presentations requiring “new” information	10, 33, 36, 39
	Project with tight deadline	1-10
	Coaching	81
• Flounders due to lack of technical/functional expertise	Multi-unit project with experts	1, 27, 28, 43
	Switch to line or staff project with experts	56-70
	Study combined with work project	78-80
	Have the person study how he or she can learn new areas quickly	71-74
	Attend professional meetings on unfamiliar topics	82
• Driven to be one way (e.g., overly tough, too individually-oriented, too self-confident)	Coaching/coursework	75-77, 81
	Make individual accountable in difficult situations	2, 5, 15, 16, 29-31, 38-46, 48-49
4. Lack of Follow-through/Untrustworthy		
• Lacks perseverance	Assign to do something they hate to do	47-50, 53-55
	Assignment with tight deadline	1-11, 19-20, 29, 34, 48
	Confront conflicts	4, 11, 19, 20, 33, 39, 44
• Doesn't understand likes/dislikes/not particularly open to “new” learning	Coursework/coaching	75-77, 81
	Give a task which is too large to handle alone or where their expertise is limited	16, 30, 37-46, 48
• Lacks self-confidence/ doesn't take charge willingly	Coursework/coaching	85-87
	Start-ups/team-building situations	
	Off-job	

II. Matching Needs to Development in Place Assignments: Derailment Factors (cont.)

Need	Recommendation	Some Suggested Assignments
5. Overdependence		
• Lack of independence	Assignment with deadline	4, 8, 9, 11, 14, 34
• Lacks breadth	Project (e.g., represent customer concerns to top management)	10-12, 17, 18, 23-25, 33, 36, 54, 55, 58, 62, 65
	Coursework combined with work assignment	71, 72, 74-77
	Deal with new group/technology/function	38-46, 83-88
• Problems with peers	Assignment requiring peer persuasion	1, 5, 7, 16, 19, 20, 26-30
	Off-job	82-88
• Overdependent on boss	Project with different boss	81
6. Unable to Adapt to Bosses/Strategy/Culture		
• Doesn't sell up well	Projects requiring presentation Coaching	10, 33, 36, 60 81
• Doesn't put people at ease	Coursework/off-job	75-77, 82-88
• Lack of understanding of complexity of strategy/cultural issues	Strategy assignments	56-70

Helping Managers Get the Most From Their Experiences

Learning won't occur by itself when managers are given developmental assignments. It's quite likely that many managers will rely on past habits and try to apply old skills to new situations. This is in fact what often happened, as a group, for the executives we studied who derailed. They relied on comfortable habits, and their learning formed no pattern they could use later. As a result, their management behavior changed little.

For managers to learn something of long-term value to them, they need to specify what sort of transition they are making—from what to what? The essence of this issue is that the manager will have to give up, or at least modify, some comfortable habits in order to grow.

Some transitions feature something the manager has never done before, such as going from a task where things are running smoothly to a disaster or fix-it problem. Other transitions feature a progression—significantly more responsibility in a challenge they have faced before. As an example, some executives who went on to be successful start-up managers at age 40 had mini start-ups earlier in their careers: In their early 20s they hired a secretarial pool; later, they started a small department; in their early 30s they started up a new product; later, they were a second-tier manager in a start-up. By age 40 they were prepared to start up a major department or function.

Typical transitions that developmental assignments may require are:

- From dealing with a problem person to dealing with a problem group
- From team-building with non-experts to team-building with experts (or vice versa)
- From responsibility for a piece of a system or project to responsibility for the whole
- From managing an existing facility to planning the rent or usage of a new one

Specifying the nature of the transition one is making is necessary for targeted development to occur. For example, a first-time project manager might need to make the following transitions and have a strategy for each:

FROM	TO	SAMPLE STRATEGIES
1. Technical expert	Manager of experts from other areas	Seek tutoring; seek counseling on major conceptual umbrellas to organize learning; targeted reading
2. Managing known people	Managing a new group	Set up pilot task to help manager see the group in action (assess their needs and skills, size them up)
3. A well-functioning group	A group where conflict is rife	Have meetings to seek mutual agreements, negotiate ways of working together, isolate conflicts and deal with them

The danger is always that a new task may be met with old behavior, using management techniques that worked well in the previous situation. Managers need awareness of the developmental transition they are making and a plan for dealing with it.

To gain from the situation, they need not only to try different tasks but also to learn something from their efforts. Some examples of methods of helping managers learn from their experiences are:

- _____ seeking tutoring in new technical areas or tutoring in how to handle different leadership challenges
- _____ placing them with a role model who exemplifies how to do something well
- _____ keeping a learning diary
- _____ asking them what they have learned often, and what habits they have that are getting too comfortable for them
- _____ having regular dinner meetings with those who face or have faced similar leadership challenges
- _____ attending coursework targeted toward self-awareness of strengths, weaknesses, and limits, or which addresses a compelling problem they face on the job at present
- _____ having them construct a learning plan (how will they size up people? team build? create a symbol for change or rallying cry? deal with the boss?)

In a brief paper such as this, only cursory treatment can be given to what can be learned from experience. For fuller descriptions of learning, the reader is referred to several publications for assistance in providing managers feedback.[†]

On the issue of effective learning, here are some typical learning differences between managers who derail prematurely because they fail to learn as much as they could from their experiences (or have limited experiences), and those who are excellent learners. Such learners much more often get to executive ranks and stay there, but our purpose here is not to encourage progression, but learning. Several studies have shown that it is not level or income that is related to life satisfaction but, among other reasons, being an active learner who seeks new challenges and learns from them. Our purpose here is development, which helps add excitement and achievement to our lives and gives us a sense of control over our destiny.

The final step in the process of using assignments in place for development is to provide guidance and feedback to managers on how effective they are as learners—what they do to block their learning and what they do to help themselves learn.

[†] *The Lessons of Experience* (McCall, Lombardo, & Morrison), Lexington Books, 1988, covers the original studies of male executives. *Breaking the Glass Ceiling* (Morrison, White, & Van Velsor), Addison-Wesley, 1987, covers the study of female executives. *Key Events in Executives' Lives* (Lindsey, Homes, & McCall), Center for Creative Leadership, 1988, is a detailed technical description of the events and learnings of male executives. *Benchmarks*[®] (Lombardo & McCauley) is a feedback instrument that assesses the lessons of experience, derailment factors, and the ability to handle challenging jobs.

BLOCKS TO LEARNING

1. Focus on results and technical matters. Little attention paid to leadership role.
2. Over-control may wipe out ambiguity or conflict with quick decisions or go to the other extreme and study problems into the ground. Uncomfortable with the fragmented pace of management work or with “first-time problems.”
3. Excessive reliance on bosses, high-status figures, or self for counsel. Not particularly open to feedback from others or fail to act on feedback.
4. Habit-bound—have a good sense of what worked in the past and try to repeat it. Like to work with same people, similar functions and technical areas. Show little interest in team-building in new situations or getting a mix of talents in the group.
5. Over-generalize—“the way to develop people is . . .” Form precepts and fit new events within them.

AIDS TO LEARNING

1. Focus on results, but leadership challenges are actively sought; such managers often have a learning plan.
2. Develop a tolerance for ambiguity and uncontrollable situations: remain open to different views of the problem, not jump to conclusions, rely on small experiments and feedback from them, taking the time to work through conflicts.
3. Seek feedback from success or failure on tasks. May not seek but are open to feedback from many sources—boss, self, subordinates, peers, customers, etc. Because we show different faces to different people and different work relationships create different leadership dynamics, this 360-degree feedback is invaluable.
4. Focus on the transition from one challenge to another. What habits have gotten too comfortable? What is different about this challenge that requires acting differently? What can be learned from this?
5. Specify what one is learning—for example, nine different people management situations are listed in the 88 assignments because each can be expected to teach a different aspect of team-building. CCL research found that while successful executives had a few general learnings about team-building, they were more likely than the derailed to mention rules of thumb specific to each team-building situation.

BLOCKS TO LEARNING

6. Low self-awareness—not attuned to the interplay of strengths, weaknesses, and limits within self. May be reluctant to express or not know what strong likes and dislikes are.

7. Unaware of impact—may get abdicative, passive, dictatorial or abrasive under pressure, yet not know it.

8. Take problems personally—may be seen as emotionally volatile under pressure.

9. Promotion-oriented—may openly plan for next job, politic, not be particularly demanding of subordinates, which may leave them undeveloped.

AIDS TO LEARNING

6. Develop awareness of what strengths and weaknesses they have and how they are linked together. Some of those who derailed found that a strength such as leading subordinates later became a weakness such as over-managing or a strength such as being creative (with many projects going on at once) might have a corollary weakness which eventually caused problems, including follow-through, lack of attention to essential detail, or leaving people dangling. The recognition of the strengths, weaknesses, and limits that we all have leads to the self-awareness necessary to make transitions to a different way of behaving. Knowing what we like and dislike, what we're good at and how that can hurt as well as help is a key mechanism in helping us change our behavior.

7. Become aware of interpersonal impact. Through feedback and coursework, come to understand how small day-to-day actions have a large impact on others.

8. Learn to talk about emotions, likes and dislikes, without over-reacting. Stability under pressure and composure differentiated successful from derailed executives in the CCL studies.

9. Focus on solving problems in the job they're in rather than ticket punching for the future. Successful executives we studied were more likely to focus on present challenges, be quite demanding of subordinates, and, partly because of that, often developed the talent beneath them.

BLOCKS TO LEARNING

10. Doesn't handle mistakes well—may sandbag, try to fix it without telling others, or lament it to where the mistake is dwelt on past all value. Doesn't handle the mistakes and failures of others well either.

AIDS TO LEARNING

10. Learn to admit mistakes, warn those affected, learn from them, and move on to something else. It's relatively easy to find scapegoats, or to simply not think much about our blunders, or to naively believe it will never happen again. Learning from hardship situations requires looking inside and thinking about how to respond better to avoid being blindsided as often in the future.

A development-in-place system can help with today's issues of dual-career couples, "downsizing," those who wish challenge more than advancement, and can help season those for whom advancement is important.

Finally, a checklist for setting up a system for development in place:

Setting Up a System for Development in Place

1. Identify specific assignments in each of the five assignment categories.
2. Form strategy for matching managers with assignments:
 - Voluntary
 - General
 - Targeted
3. Form strategy for assisting managers to learn:
 - Specify transitions they are making
 - Plan what they will do differently
 - Plan learning methods they will use
4. Provide feedback on how effectively they learn:
 - What they are learning
 - Blocks to learning/aids to learning

References

The Center for Creative Leadership's studies of executive learning from experience began in 1982 and are continuing. Many publications have resulted from these investigations and have been referred to throughout this article.

The technical aspects of the interviews and surveys of key events and lessons are detailed in *Key Events in Executives' Lives* by Esther Lindsey, Virginia Homes, and Morgan McCall. A non-technical depiction of the studies, which contains several implications sections, has been published (*The Lessons of Experience* by Morgan McCall, Michael Lombardo, and Ann Morrison; Lexington Books, 1988). A companion interview study of executive women was published in 1987 by Addison-Wesley (*Breaking the Glass Ceiling: Can Women Reach the Top of America's Largest Corporations?* by Ann Morrison, Randall White, and Ellen Van Velsor). Three studies of derailment—*Off the Track: Why and How Successful Executives Get Derailed* (McCall and Lombardo), *Success and Derailment in Upper-Level Management Positions* (Lombardo, Marian Ruderman, and Cynthia McCauley), and *The Dynamics of Management Derailment* (Lombardo and McCauley)—have been published. A summary and interpretation of the values oriented events, *Values in Action: The Meaning of Executive Vignettes* (Lombardo); a description and interpretation of other research into development experiences for managers, *Developmental Experiences in Managerial Work* (McCauley), and an inventory measuring executive lessons, derailment factors and challenging jobs, *Benchmarks®* (Lombardo and McCauley)—have been published. All are available from the Center for Creative Leadership, Publication, Post Office Box 26300, Greensboro, North Carolina 27438-6300.

Other references we relied on are Thomas Peters, *Thriving on Chaos* (Random House, 1987); and Douglas T. Hall and Samuel Rabinowitz, "Maintaining Employee Involvement in a Plateaued Career," in Manuel London and Edward M. Mone, *Career Growth and Human Resource Strategies* (Quorum Books, 1988).

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