Center for Creative Leadership®

Mentoring First-Time Managers
Proven Strategies HR Leaders Can Use

By: William A. (Bill) Gentry and Richard J. Walsh

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Contents

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Executive Summary

When individual contributors or professionals are promoted into their first formal leadership position, many do not realize how tough that transition can be for them. We often hear that these leaders are not prepared, and lack the support and development to help make that transition successfully. When they are not supported, they suffer, and so too do their teams, the organization, and the HR leadership pipeline, which ultimately can negatively impact the organization's bottom line.

First-time managers are an important part of an organization's talent and succession management. In turn, organizations may attempt to help first-time managers make the transition into leadership easier by implementing a formal mentoring program. This white paper supports this effort by:

- Explaining the benefits a mentoring program can provide for first-time managers and their mentor.

- Providing organizations a way to strengthen their own mentoring programs.

- Offering HR leaders specific steps to follow and best practices applied in starting and maintaining a successful formal mentoring program specifically aimed at first-time managers.

Formal mentoring programs are useful to support and develop first-time managers, an important leadership population that is vital for strengthening your leadership pipeline and succession management efforts. Armed with the knowledge from this white paper, we believe you will be able to gain a competitive advantage.

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Case Study: A Renewed Focus for Mentoring First-Time Managers

There is renewed focus on developing frontline, entry- and first-level managers and supervisors in organizations, many of whom are managing for the first time in their careers. Mentoring is playing an increasingly strategic role in these efforts. Those organizations seeing the most gains in developing and mentoring this important group of leaders are approaching mentoring quite differently from previous approaches. For example, one global consumer products company recognized a growing shortage of qualified candidates for first-level management roles. Over a three-year period, the company reinvigorated its college-recruiting efforts and hired talent from top universities. Determined to quickly on-board, develop, and retain a whole new generation of employees, the vice president of Learning and Development initiated a strategic mentoring program that included both line managers and the vice president of Human Resources for each business unit. Each month, mentors and their first-time manager mentees met and provided advice and resources needed for success to the new managers in these frontline, entry-level managerial positions. During these meetings, mentors explored any projects that required skills in leadership, influence and managing conflict. Mentors also shared their experiences when they were new managers who made the transition from individual contributor to leading others and making decisions that impacted others.

In addition, each of the vice presidents of Human Resources joined a monthly call to share what they were learning and what HR practices might need to be changed or enhanced in order to best engage and promote these new hires and new managers. In just three years, the company experienced higher retention and the new managers expanded their responsibilities in leading others. Senior managers also perceived these employees as higher potential (as measured in talent reviews). In addition, the Human Resources vice presidents shared that they were more keenly aware of what the HR needs were of this new generation of employees. For example, the company implemented new strategies in accessing senior leaders as well as more flexible policies in scheduling, working from home, and paid time off.

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Introduction

One of the top challenges CEOs have, according to The Conference Board, pertains to human capital.[1] Many believe that if you focus on people, increase their work engagement, and develop them, your organization will thrive. And according to The Conference Board report, what is one strategy that these CEOs think could address this human capital challenge? **Improve the effectiveness of frontline and first-time managers.** Why would this population of leaders be such an important focus? These leaders:

- Represent the largest population of leaders in organizations; many of them are **managing for the first time** in their careers.

- **Directly lead the most people** in organizations.

- Build the **pipeline for future leadership positions** in the organization.

- Are considered **the leadership bench strength** of the organization.

Even though the trend to focus on frontline managers can ultimately become a competitive advantage for your organization, **most first-time managers (FTMs) on the frontlines are not ready to lead, receive limited if any development, and believe they are failing at their jobs**. The numbers prove it:

- A survey by careerbuilder.com[2] said:

  - ~ 58% of new managers receive no formal management training or development at all before transitioning into leadership roles

  - ~ 20% of FTMs do a poor job, according to their subordinates

  - ~ 26% of FTMs felt they were not ready to lead others

- A survey by Manchester International[3] said 40% of newly promoted managers fail within the first 18 months.

- A 2012 finding from BERSIN & ASSOCIATES[4] said that first-level frontline supervisors, which consist of many FTMs, receive the least amount of money and support in training and development dollars compared to all other managerial populations (e.g., mid- or senior-level executives).

- Research at the Center for Creative Leadership[5] uncovered that 50% of managers in organizations are regarded as incompetent, disappointments, the wrong hires, or failures.

Clearly, more should be done to help FTMs make that all-important transition from individual contributor into a leadership position as smoothly and effectively as possible. Now, organizations are starting to get the point. In 2014, a BERSIN by Deloitte[6] report found that more money is going towards training and developing first-time frontline managers along with high-potential, and future leaders in organizations than ever before. That's great news.

And for the HR leader and your organization, there is a clear upside and possible competitive advantage in providing training and development for your FTMs. Because they manage most of the people in your organization, they have the biggest impact on customer satisfaction, team productivity, and employee engagement. We already see the increasing numbers of Baby Boomers who are retiring or planning to retire soon, particularly those in leadership positions.

They need successors, and many of these successors will be younger with little-to-no experience in formalized leadership positions. In addition, a predicted increase in hiring for bachelor's degrees and in recruiting college graduates that rival the early 2000s[7] means a fresh pipeline of future leaders will be increasing in organizations. Organizations that adjust to these changes can outperform their competitors. The opportunities are tremendous to create a competitive edge by strengthening these future leaders.

How can you increase your chances of building a strong leadership pipeline and create a competitive advantage with FTMs? Prepare and support these leaders through strategic leadership development opportunities. Though there are many ways to do that, the focus of this white paper is on developing a formal mentoring initiative or program.

The Difference between Formal and Informal Mentoring

The focus of this white paper is on setting up a formal mentoring program for your FTMs. We define formal mentoring as "when an organization officially supports and sanctions mentoring relationships. In these programs, organizations play a role in facilitating mentoring relationships by providing some level of structure, guidelines, policies, and assistance for starting, nurturing, and ending mentor-protégé relationships."[8] Informal mentoring relationships "develop naturally or spontaneously."[9] These informal mentoring relationships would be initiated, nurtured, and terminated by either the FTM or the mentor. There would be no official organizational involvement and no formal guidelines or support. In some cases, these informal mentoring programs can be just as effective and beneficial to FTMs as formal mentoring programs. We suggest using both formal and informal mentoring to develop FTMs.

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Benefits Derived from Formal Mentoring

Mentees in mentoring programs tend to have **higher salaries and compensation, more promotions, feel more satisfied in their job and career, and stay longer with their organization**.[10] Based on recent work with organizations, we also see leaders who participate in mentoring programs feel better prepared, feel that they have a greater overall impact in their organization, and are perceived as being more innovative and creative. These are just a few of the positive outcomes of participating in mentoring programs. But why are these positive outcomes achieved through mentoring programs? According to mentoring researchers Aarti Ramaswami and George Dreher,[11] there are five main reasons:

- **Human capital**—As mentees, FTMs in a formal mentoring program acquire all sorts of knowledge, skills, and abilities from the mentor that help FTMs perform better in their job. FTMs learn new ways of doing things, or different ways of doing things, and receive both positive and constructive feedback from the mentor.

- **Movement capital**—Through the mentoring process, FTMs are provided with exposure and visibility both from the mentor and from participation in a formal mentoring program. FTMs gain opportunities to meet with key stakeholders who possess both formal and informal power and influence. Many of these key stakeholders are in positions to influence salary and promotion decisions. As a result, FTMs are more likely to move around the organization, strengthening their networking and socializing skills.

- **Social/political capital**—While meeting these senior leaders and mentors, FTMs learn about the politics inside the organization. This information allows FTMs to gain political savvy, a skill associated with stronger performance and higher promotability.[12]

- **Path-goal clarity**—During the formal mentoring program, FTMs often receive coaching and advice on their own developmental needs, their own strengths and weaknesses, and how to achieve their own career goals. Others not in mentoring programs typically do not receive such coaching and advice. FTMs gain clarity around their current skill and ability level, what they need to be successful, and more specifically, what to start, stop, and continue doing in order to be successful.

- **Values clarity**—Through a formal mentoring program, FTMs gain perspective on how their values, work and professional identity, as well as work and life integration, all play a part in their success. FTMs get clarity around their current work-life challenges and how these challenges can help or hinder their career.

Formal Mentoring Programs Help Mentors Too

Much of the focus and benefits of a formal mentoring program for FTMs would naturally fall on FTMs. However, mentors of FTMs can also benefit from mentoring. In formal mentoring relationships, mentors receive personal satisfaction from helping others, build and enhance their own networks, access job-related and organizational news from FTMs, and become better leaders themselves through the experience of mentoring FTMs. These benefits lead to many positive outcomes for the mentor (see the research of Rajashi Ghosh and Thomas Reio,[13] the chapter on mentoring in the *CCL Handbook of Coaching in Organizations*,[10] or the study by Walsh and The Leaders' Counsel[14]). Recently, one large pharmaceutical organization began to see mentors feeling more informed by being closer to customers and employees. The mentors experienced higher work engagement and became more agile and adaptable to changes in the marketplace.

Higher-performing organizations are incorporating what is now called "reverse mentoring." As a working definition, we consider reverse mentoring as a collaborative developmental relationship when both mentoring partners have mutual goals and accountabilities. Simply stated, the mentor benefits as much from the mentoring relationship as the person he or she is mentoring. Walsh and The Leaders' Counsel[14] have found that reverse mentoring has proven particularly impactful for on-boarding, high-profile/risk assignments, change initiatives, cross-cultural or cross-generational awareness, board effectiveness and executive team coaching, as well as for strengthening expatriate effectiveness. Here are a few strategies for successful reverse mentoring efforts:

- Reverse mentoring is part of an overall talent strategy or effort to create a developmental culture.

- Organizations aim to establish developmental goals for the mentor.

- Mentors recognize that they have a lot to gain from their FTM mentee.

- Mentors determine that they could utilize mentoring strategies, tools, and best practices.

- Discussions are planned with the mentors to explore their own development goals, and what they can gain from the FTM mentee.

- These goals are then part of the mentoring "peer matching" process, and then shared with the FTM mentee.

- For reverse mentoring, it's particularly important to establish measures for progress and success for both mentoring partners.

- With successful reverse mentoring efforts, mentors are held accountable, and measured on their ability to attain their stated goals.

- Timeframes are typically more flexible than other mentoring relationships, and usually are less than one year.

- Added skill development is required of mentors and the FTM mentee.

- Resources are used effectively to support both mentors and the FTM mentee.

How Organizations Strengthen Mentoring Programs

In conjunction with Walsh and The Leaders' Counsel, over the past decade CCL has helped strengthen the mentoring efforts of a number of organizations. Here are some strategies that were proven successful, along with questions HR leaders can consider in developing a mentoring initiative:

Strategies	Questions to Consider
Be purposeful	What are your goals? How do these goals fit your overall development efforts? Does mentoring fit into your overall Talent Management framework?
Be strategic	How will this mentoring program fit into your overall business plan and human resources strategies? What is your current and desired culture?
Engage leaders	What role can the CEO and senior team play in the process? Who else in the organization will help make the formal mentoring program work?
Consider the numbers	How will your demographics change over the next five years? Who will be retiring and who will backfill these roles?
Learn from the past	What experiences have people had with mentoring before? What worked and what didn't? How will this experience be different?
Be bold	How can mentoring FTMs create a competitive advantage for you? What can you do that is unique and fresh?
Select purposefully	Who will participate? How will you pair mentoring partners? Is there a thought partner that can help you throughout the process?
Provide support	How can you best support mentoring partners? What resources can you leverage to help?
Consider the benefits	What is most important to your key stakeholders? Consider the specific needs of the mentoring partners, HR and business leaders. Review employee retention, promotion, engagement, and satisfaction. Explore organizational collaboration and innovation.
Measure and share	What is most important for the organization and those participating? How can you publicize any early wins in order to build momentum?
Adjust quickly	What is working? How can you make it better?

Want to strengthen your mentoring program? Make sure to:

- ☐ Be purposeful
- ☐ Be strategic
- ☐ Engage leaders
- ☐ Consider the numbers

- ☐ Learn from the past
- ☐ Be bold
- ☐ Select purposefully
- ☐ Provide support

- ☐ Consider the benefits
- ☐ Measure and share
- ☐ Adjust quickly

Steps to Follow for a Formal FTM Mentoring Program

If it is your desire to set up a formal mentoring program aimed at FTMs, there are several best practices. What follows is a summary of those steps based on our experience, and suggested resources[15] we provide you.

1. Organizational Support

FTMs must feel that their organization, senior leaders, and own managers support the program. Do the organization's reward system, culture, and norms encourage learning and development and supportive relationships? Make sure to involve senior stakeholders, get their buy-in, commitment, and validation of the program. They should constantly act as champions of the program.

2. Program Objectives

Conducting a "needs assessment" will help you answer the question, "What's the purpose of this mentoring program?" Clear goals for the mentoring program need to be established. A mentoring program must fit the needs of the organization, must be linked to the organization's strategy, and must have clear objectives that are regularly communicated. If these are not clear, the success of any mentoring program may be limited, as the following story portrays.

Fixing Problems with Mentoring Efforts

At times, CCL is brought in to help strengthen (or fix) a mentoring initiative that is not going well. One public sector organization anticipated 25% of their senior leaders retiring over a five-year period. They wanted to move forward with a mentoring initiative, and purchased a mentoring software package. Eager to build excitement, mentoring peers were quickly assigned, and encouraged to work together. One by one, mentors and FTMs signed up to participate in the mentoring program.

Unfamiliar with their mentoring partners, and unclear as to what was expected, it was not surprising that the mentoring program had mixed results. To uncover what mentors and FTMs expect from a mentoring program, Walsh and others interviewed over 30 mentors and 30 FTMs. One criticism was, "the mentoring program was a waste of time." Another complaint was, "I didn't know my partner, nor was I clear on how they might help me or I might help them." So we asked, "What do you need changed for this mentoring program to be more valuable?" The most commonly cited needs of mentors and FTMs included:

- Insight into why mentoring is important to the organization.
- Clarity on what is expected of mentors and FTMs.
- Support in doing a good job in mentoring.

3. Selection and Participation

After garnering support and understanding the program objectives of the mentoring program, you then have to determine who should participate. Should all FTMs participate, or just a select few? Why? Who should mentor these FTMs? In our work with organizations, we find that there are four key phases to effective mentoring relationships: Formation, Alignment, Experimentation, Completion and Transfer. Working with a global steel manufacturer, CCL, Walsh and The Leaders' Counsel established a model in selecting nominees, and later supporting mentors and FTMs through each of these four phases. This was a collaborative approach with the organization, mentors, and FTMs to ensure success. The following table provides what was most desired from the mentor and the FTM at each phase:

	What FTMs most desire in mentors	What mentors most desire in FTMs
Phase 1: Formation—partners meet, establish goals, and understand mutual expectations and concerns.	Mindset (for a Partnership) Reputation Trust	Openness and Flexibility Competence Commitment
Phase 2: Alignment—partners apply available resources, closely monitor, coach, and adjust accordingly.	Open Communications Strategic Thinking New Ideas	Resourcefulness Results Orientation Adaptability
Phase 3: Experimentation—partners collaboratively introduce new ideas, challenge assumptions, and build momentum toward goals; provide on-going feedback.	Inspiration Flexibility Humility	Risk Taking Drive and Execution Resiliency
Phase 4: Completion and Transfer—partners measure impact, debrief key learnings, and finish the mentoring relationship. Partners then transfer recommendations to others.	Recognition Influence Closure	Courage Measure of Impact Closure

4. Matching

Through our work with Walsh and The Leaders' Counsel, CCL over the last five years has profiled how critically important matching mentors and FTMs is to the overall success of any mentoring efforts. In working with a global services company, here is an example of the process behind the formation of mentoring pairs:

- First, mentors and FTMs were nominated by their vice president, and then encouraged to participate in the mentoring program by their direct manager. During that initial discussion, program objectives were shared, and then potential goals of mentors and FTMs were developed.

- Second, mentors and FTMs were each asked to select from several high-level organizational goals and then to add any additional goals. This ensured strong alignment to key initiatives occurring throughout the organization.

- Third, mentors and FTMs were matched primarily to help FTMs be successful in their new roles. In addition, mentors and FTMs were matched for any "reciprocal knowledge" of different parts of the organization. For example, a new sales manager wanted to better understand how to work with and leverage marketing resources, so he was partnered with an experienced marketing leader. The marketing leader wanted to better understand the changing market forces facing the sales function, so it was a great match for the mentor as well.

- Fourth, mentors and FTMs were also matched when there was a mutual desire to gain insight from people of different cultures, genders, backgrounds, and experiences.

- Fifth, mentoring pairs were then selected and agreed upon by the mentor and FTM. Both mentor and the FTM participated together in a mentoring training and orientation session, with similar program aspects as outlined next.

5. Program Aspects

There are three critical considerations needed after matching FTMs with mentors: training and orientation, meeting frequency and format, and measuring/evaluating impact. These are outlined below:

- **Training and Orientation**—FTMs and their mentors go through a training or orientation session that covers:

    ~ A clear definition of mentoring.

    ~ Clarity around roles and responsibilities, along with how to be successful and avoid failure in these roles.

    ~ Benefits of the mentoring program.

    ~ Overview of the different styles and ways people learn.

    ~ Interpersonal skills training, including how to handle challenges and conflicts.

    ~ Clarifying goals and expectations.

- **Meeting Frequency and Format**—FTMs and their mentors should come up with clear expectations about frequency (how often), duration (how long), format and methodology (face-to-face, phone, skype).

- **Measuring/Evaluating Impact**—There should be a continuous evaluation of the program, from the needs assessment at the beginning, to monitoring in the middle, through to the end of the formal mentoring relationship. Included are monitoring how well (or poorly) mentoring relationships are going, progress being made, and if suggested or needed changes should be made during the mentoring program. Ways to gather data when evaluating mentoring programs include end-of-program surveys, internal reports, interviews, and even trend data from 360-degree evaluations. Though not an exhaustive list, over the past three years, we have uncovered the following critical measures of mentoring programs by organizations:

    ~ Retention
    ~ Promotability
    ~ Increases in responsibilities
    ~ Global and cross-cultural awareness
    ~ Readiness for new and evolving roles
    ~ Innovation and speed for new ideas to get to market
    ~ The willingness and skills of those being mentored to later mentor others

Developmental Networks

What we just discussed is mentoring in the traditional sense, a one-to-one relationship. But in today's fast-paced, hectic, and fragmented world, these types of formal mentoring programs may not be enough. We've found that developmental networks are highly valuable when done in conjunction with a mentoring program. Developmental networks consist of a select group of people from whom an FTM can obtain advice, support, and certain "holding behaviors" such as confirmation, contradiction, and continuity.[16] Encourage your FTMs to view mentoring as a constellation of relationships[17] consisting of relevant learning partners inside and outside the organization, including:

• Direct bosses, peers, and direct reports inside the organization.

• High-level leaders inside the organization.

• Those in professional organizations on the outside.

• Personal support systems in the FTM's community, family, and past educational institutions.

More recent work at CCL[18] shows how successful leaders can use developmental networks effectively. Urge your FTMs to invest time, energy, and resources in developmental networks. Encourage them to be "masters of their own mentoring" and be proactive and purposeful in obtaining mentoring from others. Give them permission to ask a variety of people inside and outside your organization to be part of their developmental network. It will help them become better leaders and strengthen the leadership pipeline.

Conclusion

In summary, here are several key takeaways that can aid HR executives and those responsible for developing FTMs within the context of formal mentoring programs and initiatives:

- **Be strategic.** FTMs represent a significant group of leaders. Your investment in FTMs now can have long-term payoffs. Incorporate efforts to develop and support FTMs into your overall talent framework.

- **Be Innovative.** Organizations are now integrating mentoring into their overall talent framework, but in new and innovative ways. How can mentoring best help you attract, retain, and develop FTMs?

- **Solicit Input.** Mentoring relationships are most successful when both the mentor and FTM mentee have input into intended goals and assignment of mentoring partners.

- **Mutual Accountability.** Mentors learn as much, and often more, from their FTM mentees. Consider collaborative goal setting, mutual accountability, and reverse mentoring.

- **Learning Agility.** Times are changing, and leaders must strive to be ahead of the competition, not just keep up with it. Help mentors and their FTM mentees build an overall mindset for learning and development.

- **Encourage Development Networks.** We know that successful leaders build strong networks, and help others do the same. Encourage mentors and their FTM mentees to extend their learning beyond the mentoring relationship and build a strong developmental network of trusted advisors.

About CCL's Capacity for Mentoring Programs

CCL, in conjunction with The Leaders' Counsel, has helped organizations develop strategic mentoring initiatives. Services include sharing best practices, conducting a needs assessment, designing a mentoring initiative, selecting and matching partners, preparing, coaching, and training participants, as well as maintaining ongoing communications, consulting, and measurement.

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-tos 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-tos 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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About the Authors

William A. (Bill) Gentry, PhD, is a senior research scientist and coordinator of internships and postdocs in Research, Innovation, and Product Development at the Center for Creative Leadership (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, managerial derailment, multilevel measurement, and in the area of organizational politics and political skill in the workplace. He also studies nonverbal behavior and its application to effective leadership and communication, particularly in political debates. Bill holds a BA degree in psychology and political science from Emory University and an MS and PhD in industrial-organizational psychology from the University of Georgia. Bill frequently posts written and video blogs about his research in leadership (usually connecting it with sports, music, and pop culture) on CCL's "Leading Effectively" blog.

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.

Richard J. Walsh serves as senior faculty at the Center for Creative Leadership and vice president of The Leaders' Counsel. Richard provides expertise in strategic leadership, with particular focus in coaching and mentoring. He regularly designs and delivers leadership experiences from first-level managers to functional leaders, executives, and board members. With over 20 years in business, he held key roles in strategy, human resources, leadership, and organizational development for AT&T, GE, and IBM. Richard also served as executive and founding director of the Center for Leadership & Executive Development, a highly successful consortium between higher education and industry.

Richard consults with global organizations including American Express, BCG, Campbell's, Emerson, Google, Haworth, National Life Group, Phillips, Procter & Gamble, Timken, Volvo, Whirlpool, Walmart, US Air Force, and others. Richard also collaborates with other thought leaders from international consulting firms and top business schools. He earned graduate degrees in Organizational Leadership and International Marketing. He holds a number of professional certifications and serves on several company boards, professional associations, and nonprofit organizations. Richard has coauthored numerous articles and papers, including on the topic of mentoring, and is currently focusing his efforts on guiding and supporting senior leaders of functions, business units, and divisions.

Center for Creative Leadership®

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CCL - Americas
www.ccl.org
+1 800 780 1031 (US or Canada)
+1 336 545 2810 (Worldwide)
info@ccl.org

Greensboro, North Carolina
+1 336 545 2810

Colorado Springs, Colorado
+1 719 633 3891

San Diego, California
+1 858 638 8000

CCL - Europe, Middle East, Africa
www.ccl.org/emea

Brussels, Belgium
+32 (0) 2 679 09 10
ccl.emea@ccl.org

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
+251 118 957086
LBB.Africa@ccl.org

Johannesburg, South Africa
+27 (11) 783 4963
southafrica.office@ccl.org

Moscow, Russia
+7 495 662 31 39
ccl.cis@ccl.org

CCL - Asia Pacific
www.ccl.org/apac

Singapore
+65 6854 6000
ccl.apac@ccl.org

Gurgaon, India
+91 124 676 9200
cclindia@ccl.org

Shanghai, China
+86 21 5168 8002, ext. 801
ccl.china@ccl.org

Affiliate Locations: Seattle, Washington • Seoul, Korea • College Park, Maryland • Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
Ft. Belvoir, Virginia • Kettering, Ohio • Huntsville, Alabama • San Diego, California • St. Petersburg, Florida
Peoria, Illinois • Omaha, Nebraska • Minato-ku, Tokyo, Japan • Mt. Eliza, Victoria, Australia