



# THE Head's LETTER

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### It's Not About Us...and Yet It Is

By **R. PHILLIP PECK**, Head of School  
Holderness School, Plymouth, NH



**A**fter 12 years as the head of Holderness School, my board granted me the opportunity to do a full year of doctoral course work and write my dissertation under the guidance of Pearl Kane at the Klingenstein Center at Teachers College, Columbia University. The combination of research and hands-on exposure to the inner workings of many of America's premier independent schools has provided me with insights that at times clarified the things I knew and at other times transformed the way I think about independent schools and leadership development in our schools. Below I will share the motivation behind my research and several insights that I find myself daily revisiting as I rejoin my school community.

In the next seven to ten years, 70 percent of sitting heads, the baby boomer generation, will retire. This fact alone was enough to launch my dissertation topic; the question of who will replace these leaders looms large. Arguably the best training for prospective heads comes from the hands-on exposure and responsibilities they receive from sitting heads. As we all know, an effective head of an independent school must have a strategic/fiscal skill set that is similar to the CEO of a small multimillion dollar corporation, the pedagogical appreciation of a principal, the community building abilities of a superintendent, and the fundraising and board savviness of a successful executive director of a nonprofit. While there is a lot of scholarly research on the leadership development of CEOs, principals, superintendents, and executive directors, there is almost no formal research done on the development of independent school heads. As a result, the work has been exciting for me and has even created some interest in the independent school world in academic circles.

In order to identify the heads who do the best job of developing future leaders, I reached out to 15 of the country's most respected head search consultants as well as five directors of the largest independent school associations, including NAIS's Pat Bassett and TAB's Peter Upham. My conversations produced a list of 72 heads who these independent school experts described as "exemplary." Of those 72 heads, 24 were mentioned twice, and eight were mentioned three times

*Continued on page 6*

## Handling a Crisis

By JANE HULBERT and JAMES HULBERT, The Jane Group, Hinsdale, IL

**W**hy do so many of us hesitate to practice for a crisis? I have heard the excuses: “What’s the point when there are so many variables?” “What if we practice for a school shooting and we have a gas leak instead?” Worst of all, “That sort of thing would never happen here.”

The truth is that being prepared to handle a crisis well, of any kind, takes practice. In addition to updating the crisis communication plan annually, schools should choose different hypothetical scenarios for crisis drills. It does not always have to be a full-blown event complete with role-playing; it can be a simple tabletop exercise done in an afternoon. But what it must do is force all the people who will assume key responsibilities in a crisis to think through all the possible twists and turns that any particular crisis scenario can take. Thinking through the steps of responding to a hypothetical scenario instills confidence in the key responders that they know their roles and can act quickly and decisively. Perhaps more importantly, it affords them the opportunity to contemplate the right thing to do in any situation—and doing the right thing might not always be easiest, but it can never be wrong.

### 10 Steps of Crisis Response

1. **Remain calm and move swiftly.** Staying calm will set the right tone. You want to reach parents before their children or the media do.
2. **Convene the appropriate members of the crisis team.** Keep the group small at the outset.
3. **Activate your crisis communications plan and media policy.** Ideally, the communications crisis plan should be updated annually. It should be user-friendly (not a large binder with numerous tabs) and have the information you will need, no matter what the crisis (e.g., phone numbers for key people, including the cabin in the mountains that does not get cell reception).
4. **Issue a holding statement/email if necessary.** Until

you have all the facts, issue a short statement or e-mail to constituents that is *fact-based*. State what you know, not what you *think* you know; what the school is doing and will do; depending on the issue, tell the community what you want them to do; and indicate follow up to come.

5. **Begin gathering the facts immediately.** This can be difficult to do with information coming from different sources. Ask the questions: who, what, where, when, why, and how.
6. **Determine your messages and communicate with your internal audiences.** Use clear, easy to understand language, but be careful that it does not sound canned. Edit the attorney’s draft statements into “head speak.” Attorney language raises the anxiety level.
7. **Draft letter to community once you have solid facts that you can share.** Put your message through the media screens, e.g., “Can I live with this going viral on the Internet or being read on ‘60 Minutes?’” If the answer is yes, you’re good to go.
8. **Prepare the spokesperson.** The head of school is usually the spokesperson, unless the head is the crisis. Heads of schools should be media-trained in advance; emergency media guidance over the phone is the second best option. Your attorney should not be the spokesperson.
9. **Determine where you will do the interview (should you decide to go on camera).** If you are sharing bad news, make sure your school logo is NOT visible. If it’s good news, get in front of the logo.
10. **Monitor and use social media but have a plan B.** Technology can fail.

The Jane Group ([thejanegroup.biz](http://thejanegroup.biz)) specializes in crisis communications. Jane Hulbert has been the NAIS crisis communications consultant on retainer to independent schools for more than 10 years; she provides the first 30 minutes of a school consultation free. Attorney Jim Hulbert is a partner in the Jane Group and focuses on legal and board issues in addition to providing crisis counsel.



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# The Head Needs a Coach Too

Although much of a leader's day is devoted to ensuring other people are developing to their full potential, it turns out top leaders are just as interested in getting some coaching themselves, according to a new study, "2013 Executive Coaching Survey," conducted by the Center for Leadership Development and Research at Stanford Graduate School of Business, Stanford University's Rock Center for Corporate Governance, and The Miles Group.

"Nearly 66% of CEOs do not receive coaching or leadership advice from outside consultants or coaches, while 100% of them stated that they are receptive to making changes based on feedback" ("2013 Executive Coaching Survey," www.gsb.stanford.edu, July 31, 2013). More than 200 leaders and board directors at public and private companies were surveyed.

Among the findings:

- Top leaders themselves seek out coaching rather than having the decision made by their board: "Becoming CEO

doesn't mean that you suddenly have all the answers, and these top executives realize that there is room for growth for everyone. We are moving away from coaching being perceived as 'remedial' to where it should be: something that improves performance, similar to how elite athletes use a coach," states Stephen Miles, one of the study's authors.

- Mentoring and talent development are the key areas for coaching, per board directors.
- Conflict management and mentoring are the key areas for coaching, per leaders.
- Least important to the leaders is developing their soft skills—motivational skills, compassion/empathy, and persuasion skills.

Leadership coaching is a topic that has been covered in *The Head's Letter* ("A Leadership Coach in Your Corner," March 2010) and our sister publication, *The Trustee's Letter* ("A New Era of Coaching," March-April 2013) in the past. 📌

## Matrix Map: Gather Information. Deploy Bubbles. Discuss.

As a tool for helping school leaders, staff, and faculty gain meaningful perspective on program effectiveness, the Matrix Map has much to recommend it. Part information gathering, and part visual graphic, the Matrix Map is particularly useful in assessing whether programs meet both financial sustainability and school mission—the "dual bottom line" ("The Matrix Map Approach Part One: How to Create the Matrix Map," by Steve Zimmerman, blueavocado.org March 24, 2013).

"By illustrating the organization's business model—through a picture of all activities and the financial and mission impact of each one—it supports genuinely strategic discussions."

Four steps are required:

1. Determine all the programs

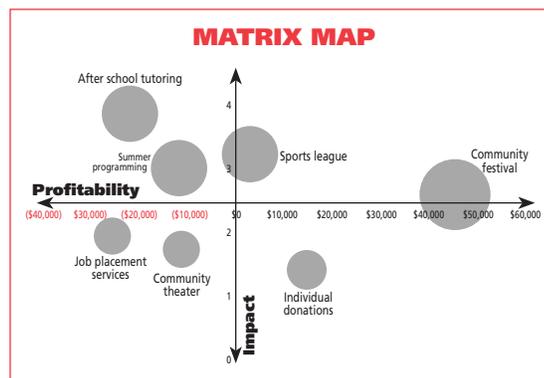
and fundraising activities of your organization: If it requires effort it should be counted, whether it is an after-school program or an annual auction.

2. Give each activity an impact score: This is best done when various individuals use the same scale for criteria. For example, the scale may be based on whether the program is well executed, suits the school's mission, and reaches a significant number of people in the community.

3. Find the profit and loss for each activity.

4. Use a bubble graphic tool to map the result (e.g. Microsoft Excel's "Bubble Chart").

Once you have a single clarifying image—the Matrix Map—use it to spur meaningful discussions with board members, staff, and faculty. 📌



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The Head's Letter, Educational Directions Incorporated, PO Box 768, Portsmouth, RI 02871.

TEL: 800.647.2794, 401.683.3523 • FAX: 401.683.6120 • E-MAIL: [hdicicco@edu-directions.com](mailto:hdicicco@edu-directions.com)

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# Teaching Creativity

Creativity is increasingly being viewed as an essential 21st-century skill that should—and can—be taught to students today. “Creativity begins with a foundation of knowledge, learning a discipline, and mastering a way of thinking. We learn to be creative by experimenting, exploring, questioning assumptions, using imagination, and synthesizing information,” writes innovation consultant Linda Naiman on her blog (“Can Creativity be Taught? Results from a Creativity Study, [creativityatwork.com](http://creativityatwork.com), March 23, 2012).

Indeed, the topic of whether creativity can be taught builds on years of research about creativity. In her blog post, Naiman highlights a 1968 study that showed that being non-creative appears to be a learned behavior (see sidebar), the result of an educational system that in the 1900s emphasized rote memorization and the ability to follow directions.

With the importance of creative thinking as a way to thrive in today’s fast-changing world, educators are looking at ways to teach creativity, starting with the notion that creativity itself can be broken into three components: expertise, creative thinking, and motivation.

For example, Naiman points to lessons from the corporate world, in particular the IBM Executive School (“Can Creativity be Taught?” by August Turak, [forbes.com](http://forbes.com), May 22, 2011).

The IBM school was created in 1956 to meet the need for executives who could think independently and creatively rather than merely respond to financial information.

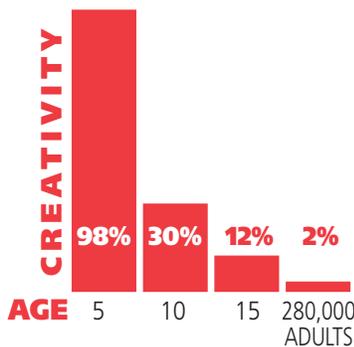
Key lessons from the IBM Executive School’s approach to creativity include:

- Lecturing and memorization are “worse than useless” because they are based on linear, rather than imaginative thinking.
- Asking questions “in a non-linear way” is essential to creativity.
- Becoming a creative person means unlearning many school-based behaviors.
- Surrounding yourself with creative people is a fast route to becoming creative.
- Self-knowledge goes hand in hand with creativity.
- Being wrong is the inspiration behind many great ideas.

In educational settings, teachers are exploring ways not only to teach creativity but also assess it, using such indicators as whether students can synthesize ideas in original ways, brainstorm new ideas, and communicate in innovative ways, according to another recent blog post (“Yes, You Can Teach and Assess Creativity,” by Andrew Miller, [edutopia.com](http://edutopia.com), March 7, 2013). “Creativity fosters deeper learning, builds confidence and creates a student ready for college and career,” writes Miller. 📌

## Learning & Creativity

“In 1968, George Land distributed among 1,600 5-year-olds a creativity test used by NASA to select innovative engineers and scientists. He re-tested the same children at 10 years of age, and again at 15 years of age,” writes innovation consultant Linda Naiman in her blog. The creativity test results:



“What we have concluded,” wrote Land, “is that non-creative behavior is learned.”

## Invigorating Words Needed for Mission Statements

A school’s mission statement, it is believed, should be a sentence or two so compelling and defining that there can be no question about the school’s points of distinction. Many mission statements fail to compel or define, however, and worse, resort to platitudes (“Mission Statements,” by David Penberg, [smartblogs.com](http://smartblogs.com), Aug. 6, 2013).

“Have you ever noticed the similarity from school to school, of the same jargon, vagaries, and stale language?” A key problem is that authentic voice is left out in favor of marketing language, states the author, a former head of an

international independent school. To improve a mission statement, start by connecting with the school community to see what really matters. “[W]e went from class to class, challenging students to examine the mission, word by word, and gave them butcher block paper and colored markers to illustrate what it meant to them...The closer you come to owning a mission the more likely it will guide and unify a community.” Then, write with brevity.

“[Mission statements] should enliven, anchor, legitimize and affirm what a school believes in.” 📌



# It's Not About Us...and Yet It Is

Continued from page 1

or more. I interviewed each of those eight, and then I interviewed a protégé of theirs who is now a sitting head. As a result, I spent at least an hour with the heads of many of the country's most respected independent schools. The insights gained were not only around leadership development, but also how these schools structure their administration to advance their strategic goals, how boards effectively support those goals, the special opportunities and challenges for women in leadership and people of color, and the evolving nature of the work of independent school leaders.

Below are seven insights gained that will inform my leadership of Holderness in the coming years and may be helpful to you in your schools:

1. Be a learner in order to be a leader.
2. Value and structure leadership development.
3. Stretch and trust.
4. Solicit feedback often.
5. Support and cultivate women leaders.
6. Be proactive in support of leaders of color.
7. Know that it is not about us, and yet it is.

**Be a learner in order to be a leader:** Being a learner is perhaps the most important characteristic in identifying prospective leaders, and that identification begins with getting the “right people on the bus.” When asked how they identify leaders, almost all of the eight mentor heads cited the importance of hiring well. They often went on to say that their school's culture attracted high performers because the school had high expectations from the adults in the community. The mentor heads also cited traits in those educators that were signs of individuals who were learners. These hires/aspiring leaders were curious, not just in an academic sense but interested in other people and genuinely interested in the organization.

**Value and structure leadership development:** Once they found their hires, the mentor heads honored their curiosity and intellect by deliberately supporting and structuring leadership development. In a survey I did of

Northern New England heads, the areas where they felt least prepared were board relations, school-wide finances, and advancement. Most of the mentor heads created opportunities to expose their protégés to meaningful work in each of these areas. At the board level, many mentor heads supported prospective leaders by making them active members of committees, and in several cases had the protégés co-chairing committees. Sitting on the finance committee was one way that a couple of protégé heads felt they achieved both an appreciation of how the board works and also an understanding of the inner workings of school financials. A final area where mentors helped prepare their protégés was involving them in advancement, both the planning and asking.

**Stretch and trust:** None of the mentor heads were micromanagers, and they delegated meaningful on-the-job leadership opportunities to educators at all levels of their careers throughout the organization. Research shows that professional development (formal learning) has an impact, but even more important is the on-the-job leadership training (informal learning) that happens when individuals in our schools are given ownership of mission-critical programs and are then held accountable without being micromanaged.

**Solicit feedback often:** Many mentor heads cited the importance of formal evaluations, and all of the mentor heads cited one-on-one scheduled meetings where they provided regular feedback and strategized with their colleagues. The mentor heads also modeled receiving and valuing feedback. By emphasizing two-way feedback, these heads modeled the value of learning in order to grow, as well as nurtured it.

**Support and cultivate women leaders:** My research showed that women often need different support than men. Interestingly, half of the mentor heads were women, while only 20 percent of the 72 heads were women and only 30 percent of sitting heads are women. This fact was of key importance in my research about what it means to cultivate leaders. For instance, several of the mentor heads talked about how women often

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## DON'T FORGET!

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You can post your teacher openings gratis on our website at [www.edu-directions.com](http://www.edu-directions.com). And, *The Green Sheet* is an excellent resource for advertising your senior leadership positions, ensuring that you reach a targeted group of independent school educators who are looking to advance themselves professionally.

Contact Linda Laflamme at [lflamme@edu-directions.com](mailto:lflamme@edu-directions.com) for more information.

won't self identify. One head cited how almost all of her mid-career male faculty had made an appointment with her to talk about leadership opportunities, while none of the mid-career women did. We may need to schedule those meetings and encourage women more deliberately than we do with men.

**Be proactive in support of leaders of color:** Not surprisingly, similar deliberateness and advocacy is perhaps even more important in how we support our prospective heads of color. Three of the mentor or protégé heads were female leaders of color, and all of them commented about the importance of heads providing this same type of deliberate support to aspiring leaders of color. They also encouraged us to facilitate finding mentors of color both in and outside the schools we head. This important area of development is one where we as heads need to be proactive in order for independent schools to be truly diverse.

**Know that it is not about us, and yet it is:** One of my most surprising takeaways was that we heads not only learn a tremendous amount from our own mistakes, but prospective leaders in a school learn a lot from the mistakes made by us. How willing are we to embrace the mistakes that we make and transform them into learning

opportunities for the leaders we work with? One protégé head said that the last head she worked for was exemplary about being transparent in his decision making, both when his thinking was brilliant and when it was flawed.

The last point reinforced how leadership development is paradoxically not about us and, yet, it is all about us. As Ted and Nancy Sizer said in their book *The Students are Watching*, we are constantly being observed by everyone in our communities. If leading is about learning, and if we are appropriately open and transparent in our own learning, then it can become part of the school culture.

These seven themes will guide me in the years to come, and I welcome the opportunity to discuss them with you—such conversations will only help me continue to grow in understanding. Like most good learning experiences, my doctoral research has stretched and challenged me. It's a project that is ongoing and that I expect will teach me a great deal more before I am through.

Holderness School, Coed, Boarding/Day, enrolls 280 students in grades 9-12. Mr. Peck was appointed in 2001. He blogs about his research and the daily life of Holderness on [picturingholderness.org](http://picturingholderness.org)

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## The Top 5 Skills and Attitudes for Enrollment Management

By MIKE CONNOR, President, Connor Associates

**I**mproving conversion ratios and yields are typical benchmarks to measure the mettle of an enrollment management director. But if I were a head of school hiring an enrollment management professional today, I'd ask prospective candidates:

1. How good are you at orchestrating relationships? Will you use the entire school community (current students, alumni, teachers, coaches, parents, trustees, and your extended constituent base) to create inquiries, to shepherd inquiries into visitors, to move visitors into enrollments? You don't need to sell; you need to facilitate the conversation and relationships between those we've served, and those we seek to serve.
2. Will you be able to suggest *new markets*, based on research, and initiate a path to develop those new markets?
3. Will you be able to suggest *new products* the school could offer to nontraditional markets?
4. Will you help me as head stay a step ahead of competitors

in pricing and value? Have you ever conducted a *competitive intelligence analysis* by shopping the competition? And then have you leveraged that analysis into a discussion about pricing, affordability, and program improvements our school might consider?

5. Will you objectively listen to perceptions outside the school and position us as a "private school with a greater public purpose?" Will you make sure the school listens to not only our potential families, but to *community influencers* so they can lead us into partnerships with other businesses or organizations so we can create win-win-wins? Wins for the school, wins for the student, wins for the organizations we partner with? If I were hiring someone responsible for 90% of our organization's income, I'd want to make sure they could deliver these five skills and attitudes.

Connor Associates ([connor-associates.com](http://connor-associates.com)) is a highly personalized marketing, advancement, and strategic thinking consultancy based in California.

• • • • • **TRANSITIONS**

**SCHOOL  
PERMANENT FOR 2014**

American International School of Bulgaria, Hungary  
 Army & Navy Academy, CA  
 Charles River School, MA  
 Holy Innocents' Episcopal School, GA  
 International College, Lebanon  
 McCallie School, TN  
 The Meadows School, NV  
 Northwest Association of Independent Schools  
 The Pennington School, NJ  
 Polytechnic School, CA  
 Portsmouth Christian Academy, NH  
 Ransom Everglades School, FL  
 St. Stephen's School, Italy  
 Walworth Barbour Am. Intl. School, Israel  
 The Westminster Schools, GA  
 Wilbraham & Monson Academy, MA  
 Woodberry Forest School, VA

**PERMANENT FOR 2013**

Academy Hill School, MA  
 Andover School of Montessori, MA  
 Bishop O'Connell High School, VA  
 Cardinal Spellman High School, MA  
 Chiaravalle Montessori School, IL  
 Christ the King School, KY  
 College Park Academy, MD  
 Community Learning Center Schools, CA  
 Denver Academy, CO  
 Fusion Academy and Learning Center (Chatham), NJ  
 Fusion Academy and Learning Center (Westchester) NY  
 Good Shepherd Episcopal School, TX  
 Hualalai Academy, HI  
 Independence Charter School, PA  
 Kalamazoo Country Day School, MI  
 The Learning Center, CA  
 Magnificat High School, OH  
 Miami Shores Presbyterian Church School, FL  
 New Heights Academy Charter School, NY  
 Our Lady of Good Counsel, MD  
 Rocky Hill School, RI  
 Sage Ridge School, NV  
 School of St. Jude, Tanzania  
 Saint John's Preparatory School, MN  
 Smith College Campus School, MA  
 St. Christopher's by-the-Sea Montessori School, FL  
 Whitefield Academy, GA

**NEW HEAD AND PREVIOUS POSITION**

Paul Slocombe, Former Head, Laguna Blanca School, CA  
 Army Maj. Gen. Arthur Bartell, Dep. Dir./Chief of Staff,  
 Army Capabilities Integration Ctr., Fort Eustis, VA (1/2014)  
 Gretchen Larkin, Assistant Principal/Head of Lower School, Milton Acad., MA  
 Paul A. Barton, Head, Avery Coonley School, IL  
 Dr. Don Bergman, Headmaster, International School Nido de Aguilas, Chile  
 A. Lee Burns, Head, Presbyterian Day School, TN  
 Jeremy Gregersen, Assistant Head of School, The Meadows School  
 Siri Akal Khalsa, Ed.D., President, Chapel Hill-Chauncy Hall School, MA  
 Dr. William S. Hawkey, Associate Head/Dean of Faculty, The Pennington School  
 John Bracker, Head, Watkinson School, CT  
 Dr. John Engstrom, Head, Seoul Foreign School, Korea  
 Stephanie Townsend, Head, The Pennington School, NJ  
 Eric J. Mayer, Upper School Principal, Westtown School, PA (1/2014)  
 Michael J. Downs, Head, Mounds Park Academy, MN  
 Keith A. Evans, Head, The Collegiate School, VA  
 Brian P. Easler, Assoc. Head of Sch. & Dean of Students, Wilbraham & Monson  
 Dr. Byron C. Hulsey, Head, Randolph School, AL

Robert Orlando, Principal, Center and Pepin Schools, MA  
 Joanna DeStefanis, Asst. Head of School, Oak Meadow Montessori Sch., MA  
 Dr. Joseph E. Vorbach, Principal, Bishop O'Connell High School  
 Julian Peebles, President & CEO of Ruth Lilly Health Education Center, IN  
 Robyn McCloud-Springer, Assistant Head of School for Curriculum, Chiaravalle  
 Daniel Breen, Dean of Academic Affairs & Faculty, Cape Henry Collegiate Sch., VA  
 Marcy Cathey, Former Head, Good Shepherd Episcopal School, TX  
 Dr. Patti Wilczek, Head, Mulberry School, CA  
 Mark Twarogowski, Associate Headmaster & Dir. of Education, Denver Acad.  
 Karen Sturtz, Principal, Banyan School, NJ  
 Jennifer Walsh-Rurak, Principal, Canton Central School, NY  
 Laurie Daum, Interim Head, Good Shepherd Episcopal School  
 John Colson, Dir. Advancement & Special Projects, Hawaii Preparatory Acad., HI  
 Thomas Scheid, Principal, La Academia Charter School, PA  
 Deborah Hof, Former Head, The Girls' Middle School, CA  
 Jennifer Ashton-Lilo, Interim Principal, Temple Israel of Hollywood Day Sch., CA  
 Renata Rafferty, Rafferty Consulting Group, Inc.  
 Otis Wirth, Lower School Head, Instituto San Roberto, Mexico  
 Christina Brown, Executive Director, Bronx Charter School for the Arts, NY  
 Tom Campbell, Assoc. Superintendent of Schools, Archdiocese of Atlanta, GA  
 Peter M. Branch, former Head, Georgetown Day School, DC  
 Norman M. Colb, Headmaster, Menlo School, CA  
 Jon Ford, Headteacher, Imberhorne School, England  
 Fr. Jonathan Licari, OSB, Sub Prior, St. John's Abbey, MN  
 Samuel Intrator, Faculty, Smith College  
 The Rev. Dr. Mary Ellen Cassini, Chaplain, St. Andrew's School, FL  
 Dr. Kevin Bracher, Interim Headmaster, Whitefield Academy

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