

# Writing

says contracts are appropriate for superintendents. About three years ago, Brewer signed seasoned superintendent Bruce Williams to a five-year deal.

"I was all for it," Brewer says. "I would be surprised if contracts are not becoming more popular everywhere."

## Let's make a deal

If you want a contract, you have to know the nuances of negotiating. You don't want to come across like a narrow-minded, show-me-the-money fool.

The first rule of thumb is to convince a course's head honchos that a contract for you will also be good for them, Witt says.

"Tell them how it will benefit the club by hiring you for the long term," Witt says, noting that most courses don't want to hire new superintendents every two years because it's too expensive. "Always approach the negotiation from a win-win position. Let your counterpart know that you're just seeking fairness in the negotiation."

In the interview process, Witt says it's important that superintendents explain what they will do to benefit an operation, such as:

- What they will do for golf course conditioning.
- How they will protect a course's assets.
- How they will work with mechanics to keep costs down.
- How they will encourage crew members to take better care of equipment.
- How they will negotiate purchases of equipment and pesticides to save money.

"If a club wants to hire the best superintendent it can find, why not tie that person to a long-term contract?" Witt says.

## For justice

It's obvious why superintendents, especially those at private clubs headed by short-tenured green chairmen, list job security as the central issue in contracts.

"There are so many places where green chairmen change every year," Witt says. "And the new green chairmen have new agendas."

Say a superintendent has an unwritten employment agreement and a decent relationship with the green chairman who hired him. But the green chairman leaves the club

## ABOUT EMPLOYMENT CONTRACTS

Employment contracts are written agreements that outline the services and pay arrangements for employees. Make sure that:

- Job offers are made in writing.
- Any employment contract is in force before employment begins.
- Employment contracts are reviewed and updated regularly to reflect changes in an employee's position.

Provisions that should be included in the contract are:

- Length of employment/Provision for termination
- Duties of the employee
- Confidentiality
- Compensation and benefits
- Non-competition agreement

SOURCE: THE HR BOOK: HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT FOR BUSINESS, 1999, SELF COUNSEL PRESS

after two years, and the new green chairman fires the old superintendent because he doesn't get along with him, even though the superintendent has performed to the standards outlined in his original agreement. Is this fair?

The good news is that more superintendents are reporting to fewer green chairmen. According to a recent study by the GCSAA and the National Golf Foundation, 26 percent of superintendents in 2000 report to green chairmen, green committees or boards of directors compared to 29 percent in 1995. Twenty-nine percent of superintendents in 2000 report to general managers, compared to 26 percent in 1998.

Brewer, who has been at the Los Angeles CC for 34 years, says more superintendents should be reporting to a course's top executives. "There's less turnover among general managers than green committee chairmen," he adds.

Of course, a club's top brass must protect their interests if they award a contract. They should have an out if the superintendent they hire ends up robbing banks on the side or fails at his job.

"It's like anything else: You monitor an individual's per-

*Continued on page 32*

# Get It In Writing

*Continued from page 31*

formance regardless of whether it's the superintendent, the pro or the executive chef," Brewer says. "If they're not performing, they're gone."

Witt notes that a contract keeps everyone in sync with each other's responsibilities.

"A contract protects a facility because it says a superintendent shouldn't be doing this and that," Witt adds. "A facility is always going to structure a contract that allows superintendents to be terminated for defined causes."

## Take what you can get

On the other hand, Witt believes superintendents should negotiate the best contracts possible. They should try to get what they can in salary, benefits and perks, especially if they're being wooed.

You might be surprised at what you can get, especially if you're wanted. CGCS Williams commanded a five-year contract with perks, including a \$25,000 signing bonus, when he left Bob O'Link GC in Chicago for the Los Angeles CC more than three years ago.

Williams says the Los Angeles CC brass came after him while he was at Bob O'Link. "I was in the catbird's seat, and I made that apparent to them," Williams has said.

Brewer has no regrets of signing him to a long-term pact with a bonus.

"It certainly paid off for us," he says. "Whatever we did

**"Tell them how  
it will benefit  
the club by  
hiring you for  
the long term."**

—TOMMY WITT



to entice Bruce to come here, we did the right thing."

Witt has a contract at StillWaters Resort that includes ownership of property on the 2,000-acre land. "I asked them to give it to me," he says.

Witt says there's nothing wrong with asking for such benefits to sweeten a deal. He says superintendents should ask for a share in golf car or driving range revenues if they're not offered a huge salary. Or they could ask for deferred payments to lessen the financial burden on the payer.

## WHO'S THE BOSS?

What kind of contract and whether you get one has a lot to do with whom you're reporting to. Here's to whom superintendents have been reporting to recently:

	1995	1998	2000
General manager	28%	26%	29%
Green committee/Board of directors	29%	27%	26%
Owner	18%	16%	18%
Director of golf	7%	7%	7%
Director of parks and recreation	5%	5%	4%
President	3%	3%	3%
Regional superintendent/Agronomist	2%	2%	2%

"About 11 percent of superintendents still get housing benefits," Witt notes. "I know a guy who gets an extra month of vacation in the winter."

Witt believes signing bonuses are warranted, especially if you're a superintendent like Williams who moved his family across the country to take a new job.

But remember this rule of thumb: Don't ask for the moon and know who you're dealing with before making such requests. If you ask for too much or are perceived as greedy, you might take yourself out of the running for a top job, experts say.

## In perspective

Even with their incentives, contracts aren't for everyone. It often depends on where a superintendent is at in his or her career. One would think that the veteran Latshaw would be inked to a contract, but he's not.

"I've always had a contract, but I didn't ask for one when I came [to Winged Foot last year]," says the "60-something" Latshaw, who previously worked at Augusta National, Oakmont CC and Congressional CC.

"I'm at the point in my life where I don't want to be tied down," Latshaw adds, noting that he's thinking about retirement.

At the other end of the career spectrum, 34-year-old Mike Sosik is not interested in signing a contract from his current employer. Sosik, superintendent of Middleton GC in Middleton, Mass., is looking to move up in the profession.

"I'm year to year here," he says. "I like the job, but I have greater aspirations. So it wouldn't be smart for me to sign a contract here."

But down the road, if Sosik hooks up with a posh, private club, he'd be interested in a long-term deal.

Some veteran superintendents are in business situations that have never required contracts. Frank Dobie has been the superintendent at Sharon GC in Sharon Center, Ohio, for 37 years, and he has never had a contract. "It's an un-

usual situation because the man who hired me, the president of the club, is still in charge," Dobie says.

Dobie remembers asking the club president for a contract 37 years ago and being rejected. "He told me, 'If you do the job, I'll take care of you.'"

That was fine with Dobie. "His word was good enough, and his handshake was binding enough," he notes.

Dobie doesn't believe contracts should be standard.

"I look at contracts as guarantees," Dobie says. "I don't think anyone can guarantee somebody else's future."

However, Dobie is all for a severance agreement, whether it's part of a contract or not. He told of a superintendent who was recently fired from his job after 25 years and received a lousy severance package.

"That's an area superintendents should negotiate with clubs," Dobie stresses. "Then they know what to expect if they're let go."

### Nothing less

Although there's an increase in courses awarding contracts to superintendents, it's not commonplace in the industry. Witt argues that other professionals receive contracts, so why not superintendents?



"Compared to other professionals, we have a long way to go."

—PAUL R. LATSHAW

"A contract means I have to do what I say I'm going to do," Witt stresses. "It protects everyone involved."

Latshaw remembers asking a course's employers for an employment contract several years ago. "They thought I was crazy," he says.

But today, more courses are willing to discuss contract possibilities in interviews, Latshaw believes. He encourages superintendents to seek them out.

"Compared to other professionals, we have a long way to go," Latshaw states. "But we're making gains in that territory." ■

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# On Your

It takes a load of money and a lot of work to purchase and operate a golf course — but it might be worth it for some superintendents

BY LARRY AYLWARD, EDITOR

**P**oised with passion and determination, hard-working superintendent Patrick Norton pursued his American dream of buying and owning a golf course last year. But in the midst of chasing his romantic aspiration, Norton realized his dream was too expensive to come true.

Last year, Norton, CGCS of Nettle Creek CC in Morris, Ill., began negotiating to purchase a golf course with his friend, a pro golfer, in his home state of Wisconsin. But Norton soon bowed out in his quest because the pot to own the course proved too rich for him.

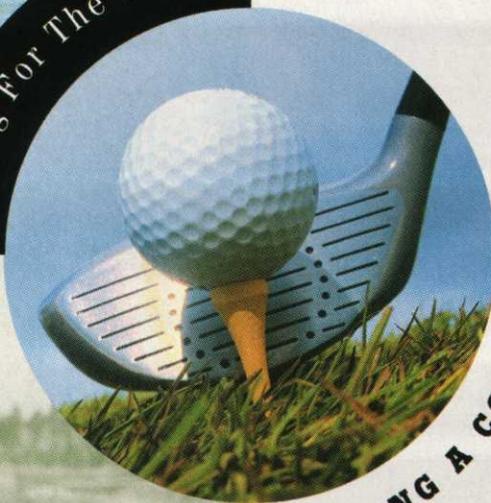
"I realized that it all boiled down to money," Norton says. "As my partner said after I dropped out, 'Cash is king.'"

It's safe to say that most superintendents who aspire to own golf courses are average people who make a decent living — but they don't have a million bucks in the bank. Therefore, they may never attain their goals of becoming owners.

Norton considers himself an average guy. The lesson he learned is that it's difficult to purchase a course — and nearly impossible to build one — if you're a person with an average income.

"I don't have the yearning to buy a course as strongly now because I know the ins and outs of the process," says Norton, adding that he and his partner needed to come

Going For The Green



OWNING A COURSE



# Own

up with about \$600,000 cash to make the deal possible.

Ironically, superintendents are potential owners that lenders would love to fund, says Don Rhode, senior vice president of finance for the golf and marina division of Atlanta-based Bank of America. Lenders prefer superintendents because they know how to maintain and operate golf courses, unlike others that know little about the industry and buy for the thrill of it.

But that doesn't mean lenders will let superintendents slide on the financial side. Just like a rich businessman, a superintendent has to have the hefty down payment to buy a course.

Most loans for golf course purchases are more than \$2 million, which means that in some cases a superintendent would have to raise nearly \$1 million in cash for a down payment. "You must come up with 25 percent to 50 percent of the cash and get a loan for 50 percent to 75 percent," Rhodes says.

It's rare for superintendents to buy courses, Rhodes adds. "But I'd like to see it happen more often," he notes.

That's not to say there aren't superintendents succeeding as owners. But in many cases, these superintendents have acquired ownership of family businesses.

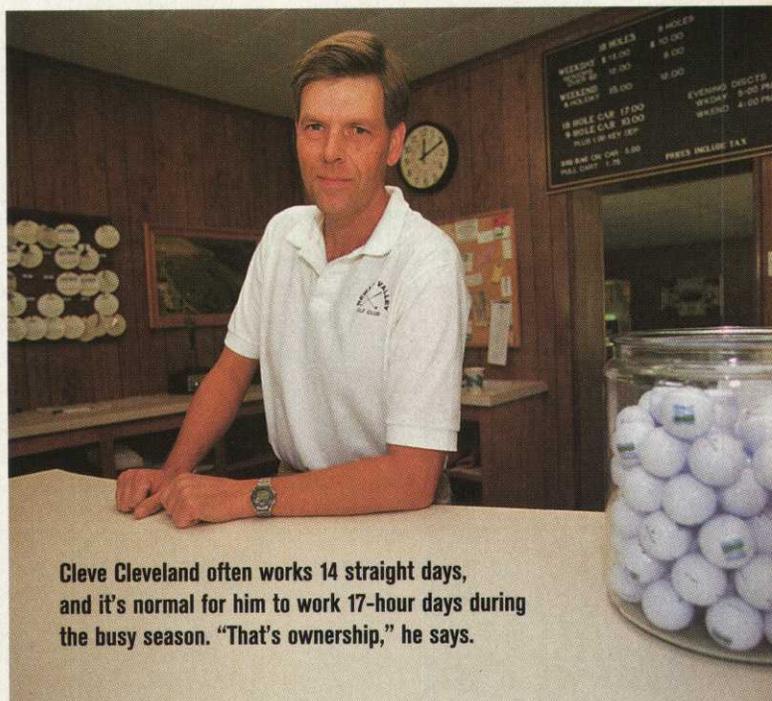
## Earning it

Mark Seabrook, the former superintendent at the Canadian Golf and CC in Ashton, Ontario, is now co-owner and general manager of the course with his brother, Brett. Their father began the business in 1975. If you're a superintendent looking to buy a course because you want to play more golf and not answer to anybody, you're making a big mistake, Mark says.

"You have to answer to everybody, including the public and your bank," he adds. "Just because you're the owner, it doesn't change the rules — and you play a lot less golf."

Superintendent Cleve Cleveland took over ownership of Newark Valley GC in Newark Valley, N.Y., from his parents in 1980. "A lot of superintendents who are owners tend to be at mom-and-pop courses like mine," Cleveland says, noting that such facilities usually have low overhead and little debt.

Cleveland says he makes more money as an owner/superintendent than he ever would as just a superintendent. But don't get the idea he's not earning it. Remem-



**Cleve Cleveland often works 14 straight days, and it's normal for him to work 17-hour days during the busy season. "That's ownership," he says.**

ber that Cleveland is pulling double duty because the course can't afford to hire a full-time superintendent.

"If I had to budget \$50,000 for a superintendent, I wouldn't make enough money," Cleveland says. "I'm forced to be the superintendent."

Cleveland often works 14 straight days before taking one off, and it's normal for him to work 17-hour days during the busy season. In the summer, he's at the course daily at 4:30 a.m. to inspect the irrigation system. Then he's off to the maintenance facility to prep the mowers. Around 6 a.m., he's in the pro shop readying the cash register and waiting on the day's first golfers. Cleveland works the register until about 8 a.m., and then it's back on the course for mowing and spraying.

In the afternoon and evening, Cleveland performs myriad jobs. He's back in the pro shop at 5 p.m. to oversee evening play. When the course closes at 8:30 p.m., he again checks the irrigation system to make sure it's functioning properly. Cleveland gets home about 9:30 p.m. "That's ownership," he says.

Cleveland's working days also include the perennial pains

*Continued on page 36*

WILL WALDRON

## On Your Own

Continued from page 35

in the neck. Sometimes, it seems like everything is going wrong at Newark Valley, and Cleveland is stuck in the middle.

Recently, Cleveland lamented about the irrigation system's main pump that was on the blink and a new fairway mower that wouldn't start. To top it off, an old duffer drove his golf car into a pond. "Every day it's something new," Cleveland moans.

Cleveland will be the first to tell wannabe owners that his livelihood is no walk on the beach, especially when you have to clean the facility's restrooms. "I have to clean them," Cleveland says, "because I can't find an employee to do it."

Finding employees for other jobs is also challenging. Recently, Cleveland had to ask his wife to work at the course for a day because he and his staff were shorthanded.

"I gave her a crash course in running the computer in the pro shop," Cleve-

**"You make your own decisions, and you don't have to answer to anybody."**

—CLEVE CLEVELAND

land says. "She said she hopes she doesn't have to come back here again."

Cleveland performs many different jobs at the course because he can't afford to pay others. "People say, 'Why don't you hire someone?' But I can't hire people to do every little job," Cleveland says.

As an owner, Cleveland must also pay the bills for the broken-down equipment. Even though Newark Valley GC

has low expenses, Cleveland must closely manage the money spent on course conditioning. "Only invest as much into the course as the revenue stream justifies," he says.

Cleveland did the opposite and learned his lesson. A few years ago, he invested in a double-row fairway irrigation system. That's fine if your green fees are \$75 and you attract serious golfers. But Cleveland's course is one of the most inexpensive in the area, and his clientele consists of players who are interested in affordable golf, not lush green fairways.

"I don't think the irrigation system has brought me additional business," Cleveland says. "I didn't justify the cost."

Listening to Cleveland, why would any superintendent want to own a golf course? Norton's answer is simple.

"People work their buns off in this line of work," he says. "Why not work your buns off for yourself?"

Cleveland agrees that there's nothing like being your own boss. There are no green committee chairmen to answer to, and you can change your fertilization program without your general manager's consent.

"I can't imagine doing anything else," he says. "You make your own decisions, and you don't have to answer to anybody."

Norton, who hasn't ruled out purchasing a course in the future, says one major fringe benefit of being your own boss is that no one can fire you when you turn 50 or are making too much money.

Financial reward is another incentive to own your own course. "If you have



WILL WALDRON

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a profitable course, you're going to make more money than you would as a superintendent," Cleveland says.

### The financials of it

Of course, finding a profitable course is the key because buying a course is about taking on a lot of debt. If a superintendent borrows \$2 million from a lender to purchase a course, he will have an annual debt service of \$225,000 depending on interest rates, Rhodes notes. For good business reasons, the superintendent would want the course to have about a 30 percent leeway on top of the debt service, meaning the course would have to generate \$300,000 to be in the clear.

Superintendents who want to be owners should know that lenders aren't throwing money around. They realize that courses have to make money if they're going to get paid, Rhodes says.

"Lenders want to know how they're going to get paid if deals don't work out," he adds. "They are more conservative than they were a few years ago."

Cleveland, who teaches a financial essentials seminar at GCSAA meetings, believes many superintendents, with the exception of those at high-end courses, want to own golf courses. Cleveland advises them to seek out mom-and-pop nine-hole facilities to get the best deals.

Rhodes advises superintendents who want to be owners to keep close tabs on economic reports. The current golf industry is healthy and prices for courses are high, but that could change in a recession. "That would mean more opportunity for the little guys," Rhodes says.

If you're a superintendent who attains the dream of ownership, Cleveland will tell you that you'll work your tail off from sunrise to sunset — but you'll love your job. Even with the daily dilemmas — an irrigation pump gone awry and a fairway mower on the fritz — Cleveland says life doesn't get much better than when you own a golf course.

"As much as I bitch and moan, sometimes I have to step back and be thankful that I'm able to do this," Cleveland admits. ■

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**T**he annual Wisconsin Turf Symposium takes place this month and features the USGA's Tom Meeks, architect Ron Forse, Landscape Unlimited's Bill Kubley and several prominent superintendents participating in a timely discussion on the most ironic of all hazards — the bunker. It's ironic because the bunker's once paramount role as a thought-provoking hazard is dead.

The golf pros and single-digit players have won the battle of the bunker. They've declared that the bunker must be fair above all else. When in sand, they must have good shots at all times, they say. Average golfers concurred because who can ever forget that awful "fried egg" that cost them a match in the Watts Gunn Flight of the Mayflower Cup?

Thus, the superintendent must do everything in his power to take the danger out of the sand, wasting countless manhours primping sand and ultimately rendering the bunker irrelevant as a hazard. How did the bunker change into a paradoxical joke?

The answer lies deep in the rough. The mentality in tournament golf is that rough is essential to "defending" a golf course, and we all know that everyday committees worship what they see on television. So as the rough became more prevalent, the bunker developed into a more appealing place for a ball to come to rest.

Throw in the 60-degree wedge, and the bunker becomes even more toothless. Either way, the superintendent is pressured by his clients and self-important tournament competitors to convert these hazards into areas as attractive as fairways or risk losing his job. What nonsense.

The role of the bunker hit an epic low when PGA Championship announcer David Feherty gasped that Tiger Woods and Bob May both drew terrible lies on the 10th hole at Valhalla CC simply because the bottom of the sand was not flat. But Feherty stated this even after Gary McCord had just rambled on for the previous five minutes how "we'll watch the players aim for the 10th hole's front bunker to have the best chance to get up and down for birdie."

Instead of being a place to stay away from, the PGA's coddling setup made that bunker the

## Time to Put Bite Back Into Bunkers

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



I'D LOVE TO SEE A  
PGA TOUR EVENT  
PLAYED ON A FAST,  
ROUGHLESS  
COURSE WHERE  
THE BUNKERS  
ARE NASTY

best place from which to make a birdie. The Jack Nicklaus-designed hazard went from a place to avoid to the primary lay-up area on a par 5.

Like most others today, that particular bunker's role was altered mainly by nasty rough around the green. To compensate for the severity of the rough, the course setup gurus order that the bunkers be raked in a way that promotes "fair" golf to compensate for the penal nature of the tall grass.

Of course, we don't need to go restore Oakmont's homemade furrowing rakes because that discourages any kind of recovery. But the governing bodies can stop placing an emphasis on rough and start subtly returning some risk to the bunker. They can do that by making the sand fluffy enough to cause a player to think twice about hitting into a bunker, but reasonable enough that a talented golfer can occasionally pull off a skillful recovery should he end up in the sand.

Sure, I'd love to see a PGA Tour event played on a fast, roughless course where the bunkers are nasty. Perhaps the bunkers could be raked Wednesday afternoon, but never touched again during play unless there's a harsh storm. Take away the rakes, and let the players take care of the sand for four days. Keep the grass short in the immediate surrounds to turn bunkers into sensitive areas that must be avoided.

Some prominent golf organization must stop letting players dictate setup and start such a trends. Maybe it'll be a European tour event or a silly season event, or maybe Tiger will say this is how hazards should be and the trend will begin.

But someone has to return some teeth to the bunker. Otherwise, the sporting spirit of golf will be lost. And how un-American would that be?

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*Geoff Shackelford's latest book is Alister MacKenzie's Cypress Point Club. He can be reached at [geoffshackelford@aol.com](mailto:geoffshackelford@aol.com)*



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Circle No 117

# The Human Touch

■ EMPLOYMENT ISSUES

**I**n this presidential election year, one would think that a discussion of *leadership* would be high on everyone's agenda. Sadly, that's not the case. The reason may rest in the definition of the term itself.

Of all the definitions I've read, I like this one the best, perhaps because I learned it as a Marine: "Leadership is the art of influencing and directing people in such a way as to obtain their commitment, confidence, respect and loyal cooperation to accomplish the mission."

The definition clearly defines what it takes to be a leader as well as what will result when good leadership is practiced. Embedded in this definition is the idea that leadership must be earned.

Being a leader in this sense is a challenging assignment because it requires that leaders live their lives according to a specific list of personal characteristics. First and foremost is honesty. Next comes competency. Leaders are also people who have a sense for the future and where things seem to be going. Finally, true leaders are inspirational. They have a knack for getting their folks focused on a goal and inspiring them to achieve it.

Certainly, the list of desirable leadership characteristics goes well beyond these, but these four were listed most often in surveys of business people on leadership.

In addition to sharing these attributes, successful leaders have a framework on which they build their leadership. Here are some of the items found in those structures:

■ **Vision** — People enjoy working in an organization that has a sense of consistency and long-term direction. A true leader sees this direction and then defines it in terms that encourage others to achieve it. A well-defined vision helps people make sense of what they are asked to do.

■ **Mission** — A mission statement defines why the organization exists and whom it serves. A well-constructed mission statement helps employees understand who the customer is and what level of care and service the customers should expect to receive. In my experience, many employees resent the idea of serving others because they don't understand

## Leading People the Old-Fashioned Way

BY DAVE ST. JOHN



THE ABILITY TO  
INSPIRE PEOPLE  
TOWARD A GOAL  
ISN'T SOMETHING  
YOU'RE BORN WITH  
— IT'S SOMETHING  
YOU EARN BY YOUR  
ACTIONS

why it's so important to the business. Make sure they understand.

■ **Planning** — Planning built around vision and mission focuses the efforts of employees on the main events of the business. It ensures that there's minimal time wasted on frivolous activities.

■ **Results** — Without well-defined results, a planning process is useless. Measuring results is a true opportunity for a leader to interact directly with employees. This is a golden opportunity to lead.

■ **Problem solving and corrective action** — Coaching, counseling, aligning and providing feedback are all part of leadership. Here, the leader shares experiences and wisdom so that the organization can learn and improve.

■ **Reviews** — Once a year, at a minimum, all employees should have a face-to-face review of their performance. These reviews provide the opportunity for the leader to discuss with them how they are doing, how they fit into the organization and what they need to do to improve.

■ **Rewards** — How much people are paid should be based upon two things: the nature of work they do and their level of performance in that role. There should be a direct, easily understood correlation between what they earn and their level of contribution.

Leadership requires a serious, personal commitment, and it really doesn't make any difference what your business is or where you conduct it. From the blue tees to the battlefield or the board room, the demand for good leaders always seems to exceed the supply. Maybe now we know why.

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