I want to Turnaround my School

The blog is for those who decided that they want to turnaround their schools - FROM WHEREVER it is, TO WHEREVER you want to take it to. It is about YOU doing the HARD WORK, and us HELPING and SUPPORTING you to DO WHAT IS NECESSARY to reclaim the PRIDE within you.

Monday, 30 January 2012

Three-stages journey of Ownership

Often the notion of ownership is reduced to individuals, rather than the collective - not in this 'ownership journey' has three stages, which could be seen as sequential in nature, since the one builds on the others. This type of journey is very important when you work within an organisation that serves and addresses social issues. And there can be no social issue in South Africa bigger than our crisis in Education. These stages focus firstly on the individual ownership, then the social ownership and then the collaborative ownership. To often, we want to 'run' to the last one in education, without cementing the first two stages.

The individual ownership stage focuses on the self-awareness of the leader in relation to the of the position, title or trust, as well as the sense of personal ownership of the challenges and responsibility to turnaround the current situation in the school. Although it focuses on the individual, the leaders will constantly understand that he/she has numerous resources at his/her disposal like the values, education, experience, family background, network, etc he/she has built up over time. These are all valuable 'leadership capital' available to be utilised in the problem-solving process. The focus therefore in not on the usage of these capital to the benefit of the individual, or individuals and groups, but rather to the benefit of the entire organisation. In this process, although the resource might be located with or within an individual, the access and utilisation of it is far beyond the individual. It is within this stage, that the 'willingness to give' comes to the fore. One will therefore be prepared to 'throw' whatever is available, at the problem in order to solve it, even if it involves giving up 'positions', 'status', 'titles', etc. What becomes important is not the individuals, but the commitment to solve the problem.

The social ownership stage involves the forging of relationships with others who have an equal stake solving of the problem. This can also be called the 'co-ownership' stage, where different stakeholders who can contribute towards the solution, be involved in the process. During this stage, the collective will get a deeper understanding of the challenges, origins and possible solutions to the problem. It is important that the conversation during this stage is constructive but honest, sensitive but truthful, non-judgemental but in-your-face. If you 'water-down' the tackling of the problem at this stage, you will not solve the problem in total. Although this process can be very difficult and full of tension, these are necessary ingredients for successful solutions. By building common ground, trust will be cemented among different stakeholders. In this way, the ownership of the problem will be expanded to the group and collective leadership.

The collaborative ownership stage is about co-creating the processes and ways the problem will be as well as what and how the resources will be utilised. Everyone in the process will therefore have a common understanding of the 'map' from problem-to-solution, without one or a group of people driving the process, or having the 'secret'. This stage involves a strong sense of communication and sharing of ideas, in order that different actions and strategies can be evaluated and tested. So, we therefore have the same destination in mind, but we open up the process to alternative ways of 'how we could possibly get there'. Everything is transparent, all are accountable, participation is guaranteed, and resource-sharing is willing. The leader therefore has to ensure that this common commitment to the end-result be maintained.

Finally, the crucial part to ownership, as captured in the steps of 'awareness' (see http://muavia-gallie.blogspot.com), is that when you commit yourself to traveling the ownership journey, you must open yourself to the opinions and suggestions of others at a later stage, while grappling with your individual ownership journey.

Turnaround starts with taking Ownership

There are about 10% of our schools (about 2 500 school, with about 1.2 million learners) that will not change their current dismal and chaotic performance (this include those who got 0% pass rate), since they have not decided that they would like to change their current situation. This is because there are no consequences to their continued unacceptable performance. And with consequence, I mean, personal consequences like 'being demoted', or 'loosing your job', etc. There is no other job, like in education, where someone can produce below 50% production, and still have the job, or not seriously being reprimanded. Quite often, some of these principals are then 'promoted' to a higher level in the hope that they are now removed from the crisis arena - not knowing that a new crisis will be created wherever these people will land up. We need to realise that 'promotion' will not improve the work ethics of people - When you give them a promotion, you are affirming and encouraging him/her to continue with the bad work ethics. Promotion is not a cure to laziness!

Therefore, to turnaround your school, you need to take complete OWNERSHIP for the current state of your school. You need to own up to the fact that you have not been AT YOUR BEST, whether it is by choice or not. This acknowledgement will not necessarily change the PAST, but it will put you on a different track as far as the FUTURE is concerned. Ownership, as a principal or any educational leaders, is to understand three components, namely:

1. Understanding **Who you are (the SELF)** - what are your strengths, and your challenges? These challenges, how can you overcome them by surrounding yourself with 'those who are good at what you are not good at'. Ensuring that you are ready every day, more than 100%;

2. Understanding **Who you work with (OTHERS)** - you need to know and understand your teachers, your SMT members, your parents, your learners, your community, and any other support structure that can add value to the school. You need to know them deeply - what makes them get excited?, what saddens them?, what will they 'die' for?, etc.;

3. Understanding **What your context is (TERRAIN)** - it is good to listen, read and consult others about what you need to do, but in the end, you know your context. But never use your context as a debilitating tool - rather use your understanding of it as an enabling tool. Look at what you have, compare to what others don't have, who are in different contexts. "Always compare yourself with others who have less that you". The way you look at your context will either enable or disable you to turnaround your school.

All of the above, is about THE WAY YOU THINK ABOUT THINGS. Sometimes your negative perceptions and/or interpretation of a situation could be as far as from the TRUTH or REALITY. Often, the reality is what you make of it. And if you want to make it to be BAD, then is will be easy to find the words and examples to justify your thinking. So, Ownership is about CHANGING YOUR HEART about a situation - once done, your HEAD and HANDS will follow soon!

It is all about TURNAROUND rather than IMPROVEMENT

So many people in bureaucratic positions in education see the challenges in South African education as things that can be fixed by having a TWO DAYS workshop with the staff, and then they (the staff) can get on with it. Or fixing it through another policy and/or manual for principals to follow. Unfortunately, most things in life worth changing need HARD WORK, and serious COMMITMENT for a long period of time to change, and to maintain in an acceptable and presentable manner and/or level/position. This is nothing different to what we need to do to turnaround the status of learner performance in South Africa. The real challenge which I want to raise in this conversation, is the importance of KNOWING WHAT to do WHEN, BY WHOM and HOW. Meaning, when you walk into a school, obviously after analysing the performance status of the school in total, WHAT to look for, WHERE, and HOW to go about changing the situation. Below is a display of 6 different options:

	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4	Option 5	Option 6
Management Strategy	Revision Management	Reconstruction Management	District Director Management	Contract Management	National/ Province management	Transformational Management
Theory behind the strategy	Theory: Programmes need improvement	Theory: Staff is insufficiently skilled	Theory: In-district turnaround zone with programme, people and condition change	Theory: Change school Management, along with programmes, people and conditions	Theory: National / Province must take ownership since province/ district has abrogated its right to manage the school	Theory: Best to circumvent the entire system
Focus of the change	Programme change	People change	System change (conditions, management and governance)			
Intended outcome	Improvement		Turnaround			

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So, it not about a 'one-size-fits-all' approach, but rather UNDERSTANDING the nature, level and source of the decline in the school, and the real challenge is to IDENTIFY the correct strategy and remedy for that specific school. In the above, the strategies range from (i) revisioning the management of the school, to (ii) reconstructing the management, to (iii) moving the management of the school to a district level under the leadership of the District Director, to (iv) contracting a suitable turnaround strategist or organisation to manage the school (or even a few schools), to (v) the provincial and/or national department taking over the running of the school(s), to finally (vi) totally transforming the management of the school.

The nature of these options is that they range from 'underperforming' (option 1 and 2), to 'dysfunctional' (option 3 and 4), to 'chaotic' (option 5 and 6). Within this model it is assumed that you have attempted some of the approaches and remedies on the left before (other options), and therefore when you move to the more serious (some will call it more harsh) intervention strategies, that all the roleplayers know that other less harsh strategies have been attempted but did not yield the necessary results. Meaning, that those in the process within the organisation are aware that they WILL move to a more intense strategic approach to change, if the organisation is not responding to the current strategies. The members of the organisation are therefore knowledgable and aware about the CONSEQUENCES of failure or non-responding or lack of improvement in the organisation.

Unfortunately, we have not built up the necessary historical profile of underperforming, dysfunctional and chaotic schools. Safe to say that the information is available, but we don't have the commitment to turn the information into decision making motivations. When we decide on working out a strategic direction for schools, most of the time the conversation is not based on the DATA and INFORMATION that is staring us all in the face. Rather, we try to theorise and philosophy and often even romanticise about the status and nature of the school, and therefore devise strategies which are often not RELEVANT, APPROPRIATE, FIT-FOR-PURPOSE, etc.

The focus of the strategies we agree on is often coloured with 'political' nuances of POLITICALLY CORRECT WORDS, NAMES, etc. For example, it would not look good if a school is called 'dysfunctional' or 'chaotic'. What would the people (teachers) think about it if we call it that? Would the teachers not feel demoralise by the name and even do less? Does that mean that we are admitting we made mistakes, or that we are not good enough, or that we are partly to blame, or that we are not doing our work? etc. All of these and more, are often the driving force for calling the strategy and the nature of the challenge in terms which are comfortable to the 'hear' of others, rather to the real situation that is prevailing in our schools.

Finally, the model that is displayed above is assuming that the education systems higher than in a status of order, stability and well capacitated to deal with the challenges of these schools. In our case,

we have to take a hard look at this issue. Most commentators in education believe that our systems than schools are equal or in a worse state than schools, and therefore would not warrant them to assist or even change these schools. If true, then we have to contextualise the above strategy in a way that we normalise our education system, and attempt to get the 'higher systems' to take their rightful place within the education system. All of these can be turned around by make a DECISION. To decide not to continue the current employment regime of appointing people in positions when they don't have the ability, capability and capacity to either do, or have the potential to do the work. Well, we are in trouble, but we CAN get out of this mud!!

Posted by Muavia at 02:45 No comments:

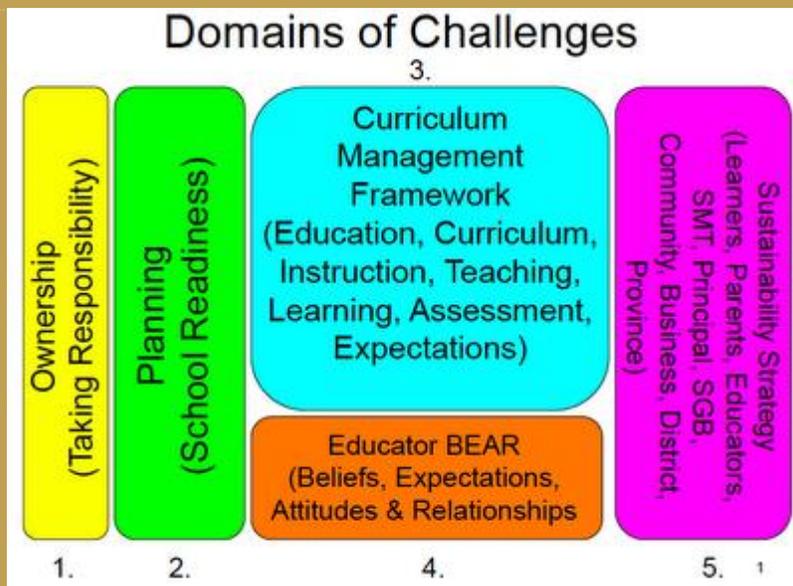Email ThisBlogThis!Share to TwitterShare to Facebook

Wednesday, 21 December 2011

Timeframe to Turnaround your

This might be the most popular question when I engage with colleagues, focusing on the turning around of schools. More often, education officials want you to do a 'microwave' event, like a two days workshop, and then hope that 'you have now informed them what to do' and 'now they can go back to their schools and do it'! Well, I need to disappoint them that I am not a magician, but rather a turnaround strategist. I have no doubt that all schools, meaning those who want to, can be turned around within three to five years. The example below will be based on a 3 year turnaround focus.

The domains of challenges which will confront you as the change agent, are the following in order of sequence:

- ownership (3 months);
- planning (6 months);
- curriculum management (15 months);
- educator orientation (6 months); and
- sustainability strategy (6 months).

Domains of Challenges

3.

Curriculum Management Framework (Education, Curriculum, Instruction, Teaching, Learning, Assessment, Expectations)

Ownership (Taking Responsibility)

Planning (School Readiness)

Educator BEAR (Beliefs, Expectations, Attitudes & Relationships

Sustainability Strategy (Learners, Parents, Educators, SMT, Principal, SGB, Community, Business, District, Province)

1.   2.   4.   5.

The first domain will be the 'ownership' domain, meaning the extend to which people, and in particular the change agent or the leader takes full responsibility for what the current status of the school is. The more you engage in 'how others are undermining and how they are not doing their work', the more you disempower yourself to solve your problems. One way of undermining yourself is to focus and continue to talk about what other are not doing, over whom you have no control and/or influence. You have to do what you have to do - and the more you focus on your ability (or inability) at this point, the more your reflective engagements will show you how different you can do things to get better results. With this approach, we are not asking you to accept other people's mistakes and problems as your own, but rather to look at what they are doing, and how they can doing things differently, and what influence you have over their change in behaviour. And we will be surprise as to how often we give away our power by not realising that we have or had power in the first place.

The second domain is all about planning. We have heard the saying which says that 'if you fail to plan, you plan to fail'. This is absolutely true! Woody Allen states that 80% of success is all about pitching up, being on time, and being prepared for what you will be facing. It is not about being brilliant, being a genius. Very often I find myself in conversations where others feel I know a lot about the a topic ... NO, I just prepared myself on the topic, that is all! And in schools, planning and being prepared are all about the eight School Readiness Components, namely (i) attendance (first teachers and then learners); (ii) teacher information; (iii) learner information; (iv) annual planning; (v) timetabling; (vi) teaching and learning schedules; (vii) organogram; and (viii) teaching and learning support materials. And we will discuss the level of readiness in another blog.

While the first two domains are supportive, the third domain is the core of what education is all about ... the delivering and managing of the curriculum through a proper framework. Most schools 'manage' the curriculum through HOPE, which is another name for 'I don't knowing what is going on' in my school. This 'hope mentality' is based on the notion that 'teachers are professionals' and that they would do their work. Well, it is not taking place, and by wishing that it will take place in future without putting mechanisms in place, is irresponsible from any manager. Because management is all about evaluation (checking what is going on) and monitoring (checking what is happening is what is suppose to happen), accountability is crucial within this process. And it is a systemic process from national and provincial level (education management plan), to the district level (curriculum management model), to the school level (instructional management model), to the departmental/subject level (teaching and learning model), to the classroom level (learning and assessment model), and to the learner level (learning and expectation plan).

The fourth domain is one of the most challenging issues to deal with, namely the educator orientation as to 'what education, curriculum, teaching, learning, assessment and learner success' is all about. Very often, and due to the Apartheid training and development of some of our teachers, they have taken on a believes position that is inherently what was part of the agenda of the then government (perhaps they don't know this consciously). For example, a significant amount of teachers in South Africa believe that 'a good test/ examination' is 'when a few must fail, a few must pass well, and the bulk must be in the middle or average'. Well, it is sad if we believe that 'some learners must fail by design ... just hoping that those destined to fail do not include our personal sons or daughters in another school. I often call this issue the BEAR IN EDUCATION, meaning teachers' Believes, Expectations, Attitudes and Relationships.

The final domain is the sustainability strategy. Most underperforming schools are managed on a day-to-day, week-to-week, and at best month-to-month survival basis. There is no long term strategy, other than often individuals giving their own opinions when you question them about the 'vision' of the school. And these opinions will not include all the stakeholders in the education terrain, and more importantly, the recipients of the results of education, meaning the community (not school community). There is often a perception that what someone somewhere in the chain of activities is doing, should just be accepted by the next person or group. A very explosive example is the inability and/or unsuitability of most of our youth or matriculants who can't get a job after matric because they are not 'job ready'. Well, some might say that they should not be job ready since they are suppose to go to higher education institutions. We repeat this non-sensical process of preparing 100% of matriculants to go to higher education institutions, knowing full well that at best only 20% of them will eventually end up going, while the rest (80%) have not been prepared for being 'job ready' in any way, whether being employed or self-employed. The interlinks and connection between these systems must be tightened in order for education to benefit those who are engaged in it ... the learners.

All these domains will be discussed in more detail at a later stage.

Wednesday, 9 November 2011

The Turnaround Framework - A helicopter view

This turnaround framework was conceptualised from interrogating the 'turnaround' research work and Journal articles) currently underway both inside and outside the country, as well as my PhD work done in 2005 and the experiences gained from interviewing and learning from four research schools in the country. These schools were two in Gauteng and two in the Western Cape. The criteria for identifying them as my research schools were (i) the majority of these learners in the schools had to be black and African in particular, coming for disadvantaged and poverty stricken communities, (ii) the school should have been producing matric results beyond 70% for the past 5 years and (iii) they should not have had a selection policy whereby they will choose the best learners in the community. So, these were schools who had 'all the excuses to be dysfunctional' but they were performing at a high level.

The first step of the framework is the notion of 'ownership' - someone or a group of people should take ownership and responsibility for the total state of affairs in the school. This work is normally done through a two days workshop which I facilitate on Managing Teaching and Learning, only to indicate to the school leaders what is important in this process. Linked to ownership is the concept of 'awareness', on which I

have spent numerous blog-time in http://muavia-gallie.blogspot.com, and therefore will not repeat work. The essence of it is developing the ability to 'see what is in front of you' and not 'see what you want to see in front of you' - dealing with the reality and not with what you think the reality should be. It includes the activity of undertaking a baseline evaluation, and the 'school functionality index' is a useful tool which I developed, and it is available to be downloaded from the internet (just google it), as well as included in the ACE School Leadership programme pack.

The second step is to get the School Readiness Components (SRC) in place. This is the basis planning which all school managers must do in order to ensure that the school is ready to start the new academic year, on the first day, in full swing. Most dysfunctional and underperforming schools take from a few days, to weeks and sometimes months to get ready for the academic year, during the same year. While others are busy 'running', these school are getting ready to 'start'. The SRC included eight components that need to be sorted out, which are (i) attendance (both adults and learners), (ii) teachers information, (iii) learner information, (iv) Annual planning, (v) Timetabling, (vi) Teaching, Learning and Assessment Schedules, (vii) Organogram and (viii) Teaching, Learning and Assessment Support Materials. Initial expose to this work can be traced on www.slideshare.net (just search my name).

The third step include putting a Curriculum Management Framework (CMF) in place in order to ensure that the core business of education, which include the engagement of (i) teaching, (ii) facilitation of learning and then (iii) learning. Often these three concepts are confused and misinterpreted by many in education. For example, it is un-educational to make a statement that "teachers must teach, and learners must learn". The CMF will include the discussion of the (i) district curriculum management model, (ii) the school instructional and design model, (iii) the faculty/subject teaching and learning model, (iv) the classroom learning and assessment model, and the (v) the learner learning and expectation plan. These should be organised in an education system so that they feed and support each other in order to achieve the ultimate outcome of learner success.

The fourth step will discuss the monitoring and evaluation mechanisms and systems that need to be put in place in order for those who have the management responsibilities, to know what is going on. Most dysfunctional schools are managed based on 'hope'. The school leaders actually don't know, or assume that things should and hope they are taking place at their school, without them playing a proactive and active role in ensure that it is the case. This include collecting the necessary (i) data at the various points and events during the learning process, then utilise the data to (ii) inform them what is going on in the schools, then utilise the information to make (iii) knowledgeable decisions which will lead to proactive and informed (iv) intelligent outcomes. When we get to an intelligent system, the ability to exist that you will know things in advance, and be given the opportunity to do something about it before the 'disaster' happens.

The fifth step is the strengthening and development of human and infrastructure capacity to ensure that the school operates at the highest level of functionality and productivity. The process will included (i) teacher qualification and competency support, (ii) teacher ethical and professional support, (iii) teacher continuous professional development and (iv) teacher professional learning group support. It also include the aligning of existing infrastructure to ensure smooth, efficient and effective utilisation through asset management, succession planning, second tier leadership, etc.

The sixth step include the strategies that will ensure that the success is sustained through the involvement and partnership between the teachers, learners, principal, SMT, SGB, school community, business, district officials and broader community. This will include the strengthening of the School Governing Body functioning, the assurance of the 18 SGB policies that need to be in place at all schools, etc.

This turnaround framework is based on an implementation process/duration of at least three years. It is not a 'quick fix' (magician) process, but rather one that will take time but ensure that the organisation is stabalised in a way that will prevent its dependence of individuals to make things work successfully.

There is nothing so powerful than the first smell/experience of success! Once you achieve it, your school

community will not give you the opportunity to go back to past excuses and practices.

Subsequent blogs will now discuss each of these steps in detail.

Thursday, 3 November 2011

Be part of a movement that will turnaround our education system, one school at a time

My name is Muavia Gallie, a turnaround specialist of dysfunctional and underperforming schools systems, in particular education systems. I created this blog separate from my personal blog, which is catering for those things I want to share with educators in general on a regular basis (muavia-gallie.blogspot.com). This one will specifically be devoted to the technical turnaround work that I do. I will hopefully share with you everything I know about turning around dysfunctional and underperforming schools in South Africa and Namibia, and I hope that I will be enriched by your comments and suggestions.

This will be a site where we will talk about the challenges your are facing, as a principal/school leader and/or SMT members of a school or learning institution. I will limit my conversation to the above-mentioned people because I believe that it is their duty to ensure that their institutions are functional. Yes, it is important that others in the organisation also contribute, but there has to be LEADERSHIP, someone and/or a group of people have to claim OWNERSHIP of the responsibilities. I don't like the argument of "everyone is a leaders, and not just those in positions". This might be true in a general sense, but organisations often employ, and pay certain people to make it their duty and to ensure the functionality of the organisation, and often they are given the space and time to do this job. Others can be leaders in their space, but the space of 'organisation functionality' is the responsibility of school leaders.

I therefore invite you to become a follower on this blog - where you claim OWNERSHIP, where you promise and commit yourself to do things differently, even during tough time, to improve the success of the learners at your school. This will be your first step of taking ownership for the current status of your school, no matter what it is currently. The journey that you are undertaking will not be easy, but it will be fulfilling once we start seeing the different we can make in the lives of ALL of our learners.

In particular, I identified four types of schools in South Africa, namely (i) High functioning schools (20%), (ii) Under-performing schools (50%), (iii) Dysfunctional schools (20%) and (iv) Chaotic schools (10%). The specific definition around these types of schools will be clarified in subsequent blogs. For now, it is more important how you define these types of schools, in your own head, and which one you claim for your own school and how you will give me the space to influence and stimulate your thinking around these concepts.

I have been doing this work on a full-time basis for more than three years - I mean turnaround work. Before this, I have been researching this phenomena for more than six years, and before that I was based at SACE, and before that I was a principal, HoD and teacher in a township school in Cape Town. During my turnaround work, I have interacted with thousands of principals and SMT members of different types of schools. I have opened myself up to challenges in relations to concepts and

frameworks which will be shared with you in subsequent blogs. I will share with you testimonies clips) from group representatives and individuals who expressed their opinions on the work I do. Most of these video clips were recorded after a two days session with participants. I call the session the 'ownership workshop' since it focuses on getting participants to take ownership of their situation. Most participants who are part of the last three types of schools mentioned above, will come to the workshop with lost of excuses of why things are the way they are that their schools, and it will go hand-in-hand with blaming others and behaving like 'victims'. My job during this 'ownership workshop' is to making them aware of the powerful SELF within them, their ABILITY to change the situation they are in, their STRENGTH to turnaround their conditions, behaviour, cultures and climates, their PURPOSE why they joined the teaching profession in the first place, their deep-seated COMMITMENT to serve others and to give them opportunities and hope, and most importantly, to start SERVING this country as intended when they became teachers and principals.

I will try and keep the sequence of blogging as close to my natural process flow of how to turnaround your school. You will realise that sometimes the order might be appropriate for one schools, but should be slightly re-ordered for another, given the contextual circumstances of different schools and schools communities. The important things is that you will GET TO KNOW YOUR SCHOOL in a way that you never would have imagined before - this is part of the process of BECOMING AWARE. The journey that we are undertaking is not about GIVING YOU A FISH, but rather ASSISTING YOU HOW TO FISH. The benefits of this blog to you will be totally dependent on what you want out of it. You will get from this blog what you came to find - if you come to this blog to be enriched, I can assure you that we will go out of our way to serve you. As indicated in the name of the blog - I want to turnaround my school - we want you to be the change agent, the transformer, the catalyst of the turnaround, because our education system needs BRAVE individuals like you to STAND UP AND BE COUNTED.

So, press that 'follower' button to become part of a movement that will change the face of South African schools. Together we can turn this situation around - whatever it takes, no excuses.

Posted by Muavia at 14:29 No comments:

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