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Full Participation?

When I first got involved in service in 9/85, I was a GSR to the then-Dade Co. ASC (it's now 4 areas!). During my first few months there, the trusted servants of the area were still able to vote. But there was a movement afoot in NA at the time: a principle of "one addict, one vote" was being spread. Those who asserted this idea told us, every addict has a vote at his home group. If an area assistant treasurer votes at area, his one vote has as much influence as all the members of your home group -- and he got to vote there too! Moreover, if a regional assistant secretary has a vote, that vote is like a veto to all the votes of all the members of all the groups in your home area. Why would that NOT be too much power for one addict to wield?

At the time, a couple of addicts who might lose their voting privilege objected. But by and large, all the groups saw the wisdom (and the application of anonymity principle) in changing the vote to strictly group conscience; and we marveled to watch those trusted servants at the area level agree, and vote themselves out of a vote! The same thing happened at the regional level, and both the Florida region, and our later South Florida region after 1/90, observed an ASR-only vote.

After we'd done that, the discussion naturally turned to: "Well then, why is it different at world?" A traveling trustee told us that it had always been intended that the WSC would evolve into a group-conscience-only body; it's just that at the first few WSC's, there were

so few regions represented, that if votes hadn't been given to the trusted servants, only one or two people would have been making all the decisions for the fellowship! He said that once there were enough regions everyone would see the wisdom of the RSR-only vote; after all, what could possibly be the justification of one person having the same voting power as one region with 20 areas and 500 groups?

We agreed, and sent the RSR-only motion several times. As did many other regions. But one way or another, it kept being defeated (usually by procedural means). I seem to recall one instance when an RSR was privately persuaded to drop the motion while at the WSC; when he got home he was fired for it. It seems that things ARE different at world, and there were too many "powerful addicts" opposed to losing their votes; the RSR's were heavily lobbied, and the influential arm of "sponsorship lineages" sometimes exerted more persuasion than concern with group conscience. This has been "the motion that wouldn't die" over the years, and every tactic imaginable has been used both to promote it and to defeat it.

But an end run was dreamed up: The concepts. You will note that our Steps and Traditions are almost verbatim from AA. But the NA concepts (at first called the "principles of service") read very different from AA's. They were redesigned to perform specific political purposes. One of these was the idea of "full participation." Another was the rather bald declaration that Group Conscience was not in itself a method for decision making, (!!) but merely a technique to help us arrive at decisions. This was later toned down, but the intent was pretty clear.

The aim, through the concepts and guide to service ad hocs, has been to tone down the emphasis on group conscience, and even to encourage areas and regions to revert back to the "all trusted servants get a vote" method. If this practice became widespread, it would all but enshrine the practice at WSC, and give it legitimacy because "everyone would be doing it." A few areas, thinking the Guide to Local Service was some kind of new "NA Law," have actually reverted to all officers having votes; it is debatable whether to fairly continue to call them trusted servants, because once they have the same vote as an area, they have the power to vote in their own interest, unencumbered by any group-conscience process.

Oh, but what about the "Group Conscience of the Committee?" This has been used by loose-cannon committees since day one. GROUPS have group conscience. Committees do not. Groups create, through their GSR's, the ASC and all the subsequent committee structures. These committees SERVE THE

GROUPS; they are not groups themselves. The trusted servants serve AT THE PLEASURE of the groups and the GSR's who represent them; sadly, the GSR's are often naive and easily bullied, though highly principled ASC chairs will sometimes remind them: "This is YOUR ASC! YOU call the shots, not the officers! What is your pleasure?"

We were all taught that NA service was an inverted pyramid, with the wide part -- the groups -- at the top, and the WSC at the bottom providing service to all above it.

The subtle but potent changes in our service guides and voting structures keeps adding pressure to the lever that is set to topple that delicately-balanced pyramid over. The more one addict has the same potency in decision-making as a group, or an area, or a whole region, the more irrelevant one addict voting in his home group conscience becomes.

It is always appropriate to look ahead, and envision what kind of fellowship we are to become. There is no question that a larger population makes NA service more unwieldy; but that doesn't mean that we need to make our structure less democratic to make it more manageable.

Around here, the groups and areas still seem to think that democracy is a spiritual principle, and that the right of self-rule is a key part of the obligation of self-support. I can only hope that party lines and loyalties do not dim that vision around the fellowship.

DISTANCE MAKING BEHAVIOR

While attending a regional lit workshop in the TriState Region, I stumbled on a simple idea that won't go away. It is so obvious that what's happening may not seem that important on the surface. There was a biker type H&I person there and another member turned out to be a lawyer. At some point in the discussion, I pointed out that both had ways of distancing people and that this restricted their access to others and resulted in some degree of undesired loneliness. Whether it is a pretty girl wearing unattractive clothes or a competent worker screwing up a simple assignment, it is occurring to me that people make distance between them and others out of fear of the other making demands they cannot meet or rejection of their basic identity as human beings. Distance making behavior is a fact of life and everyone needs their space. An exception may be when we addicts are suffering, we may try to make distance between ourselves and those we have asked for help directly as friends or sponsors. We also may be rejecting offers of help or sincere concern from other members who have come to know us as members.

While some of this can be very functional and real, God wants me to be happy and extend my joy in life today. There are new opportunities unfolding in my direction that are astonishing. The clean life never ceases to amaze me. I have the uneasy feeling that we lose many of our members because they don't know it is okay to keep on reaching out even though they have been around awhile. We all still send out signals and indicate our readiness to play, share or give attention to the people we encounter in our day to day life. I feel lucky whenever I can jump out of a track and view the broader horizons that real life has to offer.

We shall attempt to print all articles promoting a change in our intolerance and indifference towards spiritual principles. We seek any and all ideas for this publication to become a venue for change. All materials shall be printed in a spirit of anonymity.

We encourage the use of humor and lampoon to stimulate thought and levity. Our hope is to find ways to transgress the perceived separation that exists amongst members of our society.

NA Simple Realities

1/ The most important piece of literature is the meeting list. Studying the program and learning the principles is great; but the single most useful lesson is: where's the next meeting?

2/ The most important service position is group secretary. A good group secretary has the coffee made, the chairs set up, the literature arrayed, meeting lists always available, an able chairperson or speaker ready; and generally provides or ensures an atmosphere of recovery. There will never be a shortage of egomaniacs who want to be the king of all NA; but we can always use a few more good group secretaries!

3/ The most powerful example we set is staying clean. It is wonderful that we can show the newcomer credible examples of sanity, prosperity, serenity, spirituality, kindness and love. But not every member can exhibit such a wonderful life in all particulars. Almost all of us, though, can show that, together, we do stay clean. And when we work a program, we do recover.

4/ The needs of the group are paramount. The primary NA message is carried in the NA groups. All too often, some groups place show ahead of substance. Just last week, the richest group in town made a multi-hundred dollar donation to area -- but refused to back up and set aside money for literature and chips! This is a kind of blindness to fundamental needs that can damage groups and their message.

5/ Speakers should be NA members. It sounds ridiculous, but it happens oftener than we might admit: someone is asked to chair for the month; they ask their grand-sponsor who just HAPPENS to be an AA member -- and while they may have terrific AA recovery, they share on and on about the Big Book, their sobriety, the Where and When, and Dr. Bob. It's as though they don't know where they are; and they carry a very confusing message to the newcomer, for whom these references might as well be Greek. It doesn't matter, and we should have no opinion, where else a speaker goes: church, AA, school or the movies. That is their business. But they should have been an NA member, familiar with the NA program and message, and capable of speaking that language to addicts. That is our business. If they're winging it, trying to substitute drugs for alcohol in their message on the fly, they are simply not gonna be able to carry a clear NA message.

6/ NA groups must be good neighbors. Together we are responsible for the reputation of NA as a whole. Most groups hate to "police themselves;" very few people want to be NA cops, as it may result in being disliked! But when some members toss butts, leave spills,

fight, yell and otherwise "scare the straights," or when groups leave messes for the facility to clean up, then groups lose their meeting places. We may never know how many addicts found a locked door where there should have been a meeting, and turned around to go cop, and ended up dead. Staying in one place for a long time, and caring for that place, is part of the personal and group stability that are essential parts of recovery.

7/ NA members, in their own best interest, need to be patient, tolerant and forgiving. I was crazy as a newcomer. You probably were too. Just about any newcomer who qualifies as an addict didn't get here because they were having a nice day. But with time clean and energy put into recovering, most of us can turn out okay -- even terrific. The person we make fun of or insult because they're talking crap today, may be the very person we need help from tomorrow. As wise addicts have often said -- "Be kind to the newcomer; you never know whether someday you might need to ask him to be your sponsor!" As for the oldtimer, it doesn't hurt to treat him with love and respect too. Most of us will hug anybody, but perhaps, realistically, most of us will balk at going way out of our way to help someone who has always been surly or unkind to us. Since it doesn't cost anything to be civil, it's just good insurance to bite our tongues when we want to gouge out a new excretory system for someone. Wiser addicts than me have said, whenever I'm taking your inventory instead of my own, I'm not centered in recovery.

8/ God can be as simple or complex as we like; but our relationship to God needs to be profoundly simple. Einstein said, "Make things as simple as possible -- but no simpler!" He also said, "When you have glimpsed utter simplicity, you have seen the hand of God." My God can be the master of the universe; but I need to keep my approach to God the same as a little child running into his daddy's arms. By starting with a God-relationship that is loving, safe and intensely personal, we may be able to trust God with the hard changes and surrenders that are required for recovery. A distant, angry, confused God-concept is, very simply, not going to be easy to trust. Keeping our own paths private, while suggesting a simple, trusting relationship with God, is the best way to insure others' right to a God of their own understanding, without any catches.

9/ Life needs to be fun. Addicts always say, "I didn't get clean to be miserable." It seems that addicts who laugh, dance, sing, go out together, go traveling and to conventions, and treat themselves to some good wholesome amusement have a much easier time in recovery than those who are isolated, spartan, austere, or excessively frugal. We need not feel guilty having a good time for a while, doing nothing "productive." Mental health seems to need recreation -- which is, after all, recreating a state of mental balance. Life is tough enough without depriving ourselves of some joy. If an NA group or area can provide events for our common enjoyment, it's not a waste of time; it's a way to have clean fun together, and very much attracts the newcomer.

10/ Carrying a message and Giving it away are ends, not means. At every meeting we read, "We can only keep what we have by giving it away." So often we see members with a little time, pouncing on a newcomer in the parking lot and saying, "C'mere!! Lemme give you my phone number!" Scares the pants off some of 'em. Early on, the motive of "giving it away" is selfish: literally, in order to keep it. But giving away the message of

recovery is not our means of doing penance. It is an end in itself, and our highest good and primary purpose. Once we start getting sponsees, we begin to see this differently, because we start to really care about someone else's recovery, not just as "our way of getting into heaven," but for their own sake. As we really begin to want to help out of love and compassion, we start to do the right thing for the right reason. This is not a competitive sport. Others' recovery does not diminish our recovery. In fact, others' recovery can only enhance our recovery. The more people in our home group who are practicing robust programs, the more people we can rely on; and the more valuable and positive the meetings will be. By encouraging one another and supporting each other, we not only add to the mutual atmosphere of recovery -- we also change our self-concepts, from that of self-centered dope-fiends to that of loving souls, and beloved children of God. If everyone knew that they could find joyous self-approval in generosity, they'd rush to give it away! But paradoxically, it's only later that we find that if selfish gain had been our motive to serve, it would not have worked anyway. It works when we start with the decision to be loving and giving.

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12th Step--Practice These Principles

and

12th Tradition--Principles Before Personalities

Yes boys and girls, brothers and sisters, it appears that, just as we feared, this recovery business really is all about practicing spiritual "principles" after all.

There is no doubt, of course, that first of all our N.A. is a "program of complete abstinence from all drugs." total abstinence is a pre-requisite for recovery. It is also an undisputable fact that "those who keep coming to our meetings regularly stay clean"--meeting makers make it. As a matter a fact, I would venture to say, although I really don't have any solid statistics, that a great number of the "real addicts" who come through our doors are at least moderately successful in following the suggestion of "don't pick up and go to meetings," and therefore are able to remain abstinent while doing so. It is only when they "get a life" and stop coming, that the feces hits the ventilator.

Once we are comfortably clean and going to meetings, then there comes the one about "we can't keep what we have unless we give it away." Now honestly, this is really confusing. If I have a dollar and give it to you, then you have the dollar and I don't. That is clear enough isn't it? So why is it that we say that we can only keep what we have by giving it away? That seems impossible, right? It just doesn't make any logical sense!

I believe that this is where we start coming face to face with the REAL nature of our disease of addiction. We start to get an inkling that addiction is a progressive disease that can kill us with or without the drugs, a Spiritual deficiency if you will, and that if we are to remain abstinent and continue to progress on the path of recovery, then we must change our lives and start living in accordance with spiritual principles, instead of continuing to live like we used to, imprisoned by self-centeredness, greed, lust, etc.

The worst tragedy is that our disease keeps us groveling in subjugation, holding our spirits buried deep in the mire of continue egocentricity. We continue suffering, living day to day (even in clean time), still lying, cheating, and stealing to get the next dollar, the next piece of ass, or the next accolade (pat on the back). If nothing changes, nothing changes. If we insist in continuing to live in fear, by the same rules that we did while using, we will experience very little improvement in the daily quality of our lives. The disease needs to be "arrested" before recovery becomes possible. Only spiritual living can arrest addiction. Only God is stronger than addiction.

Our new way of life needs to be all about spirituality. We MUST practice the spiritual "principles" on anonymity, unity, and selfless service, if we are to "improve our conscious contact with God." If you are--at the end of the road--please join us!

NOT EVERYBODY

Not everybody in NA is loving and caring, at least not all the time. As we grow, we get over many of the fears and attitudes that reduced us to loneliness and despair before recovery. Sometimes, we find ourselves with members who have similar problems and just for a moment, it may seem OK to sabotage someone's personal problems by making fun of them, contributing gossip to embellish rumors, or giving someone hell because we think we can get away with it. Obviously, we are not at our best when we do these things. What we call 'our disease' goes active and we do whatever it is, and may even do it again. This is essentially why recovery is based on choice; volition, not coercion. When I work my steps, ask for God's help and step into a vision of myself free from my character defects, I get to live a new life. A life not possible without divine intervention.

Ernest Hemingway wrote a line once, "Ask not for whom the bell tolls, it tolls for thee."

To me this means when any one of us is hurting or suffering from character defects, I am experiencing that persons pain, that persons defect or that persons' confusion. I have learned to realize that this process is called identification. I have a choice today as to what role I can play. I can pray for God to inspire and guide me to find something to help the person or the situation. If I can't do anything helpful, I can sort of hang around a wait for a chance. I may just let go and let God handle it. When I do this, I always try to pray for the person to get the help, the patience or the understanding they need. The last resort lets me just walk away with the knowledge that something will be done as a result of my prayer whether I ever know about it or not!

While there is always the chance that I may be wrong, sometimes other people are really out of line and I have to work my steps extra hard not to become just like the people I disapprove of. I may not be happy with everyone, I know that they pay the price of foolishness: they have to live with it more than I do! In practice, when things like this come up, I always check to make sure I am not way off base and seeing things not as they are. I hate being embarrassed and want to check out my facts, possible motives and my mood. If these are in order, I pray to be used as an instrument and try and talk with the person or persons directly. Checking with my sponsor is a good way for me to know I have really surrendered. If I really am upset and want to make it better, the closer I can work to the source of the problem, the better.

If they are open to discussion, I ask questions to see why they are doing as they are and if they might be willing to change. If they are, I let them know my concerns and thank them for their openness. If they are not, I go away and do the time honored thing: I let go of them and arrange my life so that what they do affects me as little as possible and try to avoid situations that would bring me into open conflict with them. If this is impossible, I try to get across the minimum demands I have. I am usually willing to give a little on things if the other guy is willing also. I don't mind making the first move but I expect to be treated with as much dignity and respect as I offer to others. If this doesn't work, then I really have a problem. I have to pray, meditate, go back to my sponsor, home group and recheck all my facts. However I do it, I have to make some kind of arrangements. If the persons causing me the concerns are somehow on my territory, I may ask them to leave. If I am on theirs, I give them notice and make other arrangements.



When it comes to problems in Narcotics Anonymous and the conflict becomes major, I have to check with other members to see if they are thinking like me or if I am out to lunch in some way. I have found that when I have to, just giving it time usually works best. It may be expensive but we are not talking about something I can personally exercise power or control over. Sadly, many of the times my concerns were well founded, and the other persons or persons fail to stay clean. Many times they hurt others who are innocent. I have to trust to the power of my God to take care of these things and work the miracles which are beyond me.

If these problems keep on occurring, it is fair for me to keep on trying to find a way to help. I have found that when the disease is active, it is nearly impossible to handle things directly. I have to work in a contained area to effect some good or some relief and hope to expand the boundaries in time.

12th Step

1. What is a Spiritual Awakening?

A Spiritual Awakening is not a singular event, it is the continuing process of self realization and fulfillment that happens as we gradually change our lives from active addiction as characterized in clean time by the substitutions of our obsessive use of sex, food, nicotine, caffeine, money, property, prestige, etc., to living by spiritual principals in ever growing freedom from our disease.

2. How does working these Steps awaken your Spirit?

It is simply a process of increasing self-awareness gained through constant inventory. It is not complicated it, is a very simple process and it is available to all of us who really want it. The most important thing about this process is that it really works.

Beginning with the First Step and the First Tradition, day by day we become aware of who we really are, how we are fully capable of the highest and lowest possible actions and that it is entirely our personal responsibility to make the proper choices with God's help. We realize how our living choices affect those around us and the benefits or consequences thereof. Gradually, this higher self awareness engenders intuitive right action. As we slowly incorporate the spiritual principals of our program into our daily lives and intensify our search for God, the egocentricity that fuels our disease and weakens our lives are progressively blessed by selfless service as we enjoy the increasing recovery of our true selves.

3. What is our message?

Our message is that any addict can stop using, find a new way of living free from the horrors of active addiction by simply, sincerely, working the Steps and Traditions of Narcotics Anonymous day by day.

4. How do you carry our message?

I carry our message to the best of my ability by the example of the way I live, not just by what comes out of my mouth. By constant surrender to God so that I may be a channel for God's love in my life. My life is more and more about service every day that passes.

5. How is selfless service the principal of this Step?

At the lower end of the spectrum, at the root of our disease stands egocentricity and opposite that at the highest level our freedom from active addiction comes from selfless service and anonymity. Recovery flows with life, the more we give it away the more God gives us.

6. How is God in the 12th Step?

God is ever present as I practice these Spiritual Principals in all my affairs. I need God's help to do the right thing so I need to seek him often indeed if I am to practice these principals in all my affairs.

WAR? GOOD GOD! WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR?

I must pause to reflect on what has happened here. There has certainly been a successful war waged on the disease of addiction for quite some time. The wins have been many and the deaths have been fewer. The craftiness of the enemy continues to increase and so must the abilities of its opponents. The height of ability in waging war is in not having to fight. Not easy to do when your enemy is as insane as addiction. Ongoing spiritual growth has proven itself as the only way to kill this foe. Yet the disease has managed many times to place those who might be allies into oppositional camps. We have evolved a doctrine of workable solutions for this campaign against the disease. This is best seen in the Basic Text. It doesn't enter the realm of dogma which implies forced compliance. The simplicity is its beauty. So we have something to fight for here. Things like autonomy and anonymity, to mention only a few. Things of the spirit that we had never known before. These principles are the weapons that we must use to fight for our freedom. Else the neurotic elements within blow us to bits.

Yet, currently, there is a very large effort towards an ongoing propaganda to change these rights. This plan of enforceable dogma will change the lessons that we've learned here, that work in helping the addict

to evolve. If you look at the production of this information you will see that it is from a very limited minority of the Fellowship. The funding comes from your seventh tradition and outside enterprises. Do you believe you know the whole picture? Does the fellowship in it's current state of apathy even care? Yet where else can you get information, that you might be able to trust? The propaganda says anyone that is doing it different is destroying our unity. The effort has to be considered in good faith and well intended. Yet many times good is the enemy of the best and only the best will bring true good.

The last major propaganda was in the early 80's surrounding the Basic Text. It was that addicts should and could write for addicts. That the process included everyone. Well that wasn't true when it was first written. It became true through the participation of addicts like you that were willing to look at things other than what the system produced. Will these new ideas, pawned off as how things are done in N.A. fair as well? I think not, because they limit your participation and change the way we do literature and service.

Our financially backed leaders (your money) have the ability to send out a message that our structure and ways of doing things are our problem. The truth seems to lie somewhere closer to the fact that we have become apathetic in our recovery, and our procrastination about taking a stand stifles us. These are enemies of our recovery.

Who owns Our Fellowship?

I am a member of Narcotics Anonymous. How do I define that term for myself? I base my program on the concept of powerlessness over addiction as stated in the first step of Narcotics Anonymous. My recovery is patterned after the spiritual principles found in the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Narcotics Anonymous. I actively participate in a Home Group. I serve that Home Group or any group of Narcotics Anonymous with the belief that "...one addict helping another is (therapy without) parallel", and, "...that the individual is precious to the group...", as stated in our basic text discussion of the first Tradition.

Recently, I received a report from a "Trusted Servant" in the mail. The spelling, typing and grammar was as incorrect as my own often is. { I could relate!} I have learned that willingness is more important than expertise. The name of the trusted servant is unimportant, however, accepting a position of trust holds us to be "directly responsible to those we serve". Our trust was violated by the actions of this "Trusted Servant" as they themselves reported.

In the position of a Regional subcommittee chair this "trusted servant" went to the W.S.C. quarterly and during an open forum reported "about the area in our region that is planning to write literature, use it on their tables and make it available to other areas." This "Trusted Servant" asked "for some direction" from the "Trusted Servants" of the World Service Conference.

The direction given was, "...We should encourage them to write and help them to understand the process that we as a fellowship use and that the purpose of this process is to insure that a piece of literature is first submitted to the WSC-LC, then the Board of Trustees and then to the fellowship." They went on to say, "...this area might develop a newsletter and use these articles in them or utilize the regions' existing newsletter." The "regional Trusted Servant" reported that "it was stated that it is rather arrogant for anyone to think they do not have to follow the process developed by the fellowship, it also creates "disunity".

Who owns THIS FELLOWSHIP???! Do our Boards and Committees? DO our TRUSTED SERVANTS? Who is the ARROGANT party in this essay on what groups and members may or may not do? This area that our Trusted Servant felt the need to "run and tattle to the 'World' about" has members who were on the World Literature Committee that wrote OUR BOOK. This Area held one of the World literature Conferences where the BOOK was WRITTEN. This area knows through experience what the "real" Fellowship Literature Process was. It was not allowing boards and committees to decide and dictate what was written and it was never perceived that Groups and Areas would only be allowed to "write to newsletters" and such. A controlling posture like that would have resulted in no book ever being written. Most Addicts with under twelve years clean would now be dead, in jail or insane if not for the willingness of "this group and area"! The area in question trusted this "Trusted Servant" to serve their Area. The "Trusted Servant" however, seems to believe that the only direct responsibility they have is to service boards and committees. My Home Group is not in this Area, must we now worry that next time this so called "Trusted Servant" will report on our actions?

The direction given by the W.S.C.-L.C. states that the current literature process is "holding with the spiritual principles of Narcotics Anonymous". This is the process that replaced the process that wrote the Book. The current process will not allow any member who worked on the Book to participate in our lit. committee today. This current process is responsible for paying a professional to rewrite the fourth edition and writing the fifth edition without fellowship input or approval {you did not get to go over this book word for word as we did before this current process began}. You and I are only allowed to approve or disapprove literature today. This current process didn't even look at the hundreds of pages of input collected since 1984 on the "Just For Today Book". This current process chose to write it in closed committee instead. This current process has never made amends for braking faith with the FELLOWSHIP. Were are the spiritual principles in these actions?

Who Owns This Fellowship? Narcotics Anonymous members do: Narcotics Anonymous groups do. If not for the members and groups there would be no need for a service

structure! There would no need for service positions or titles. Who owns our literature ? The members and the groups do. We do! WE WROTE IT, and the only "direction" we had came from a loving God as he expressed himself in our Group Conscience.

The Spiritual Principles of Narcotics Anonymous are NOT NEGOTIABLE, no matter how many "concepts" we write to try to relieve ourselves from direct responsibility. No matter how hard we try to decide for, govern and dictate to, members, groups and Areas. No matter how convincingly our addiction tells us that our service position gives us the "right" to tell members, groups and areas what they may or may not do.

MEMBERS OWN THE FELLOWSHIP

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