

Spirituality in the Workplace

By Dr. William A. Guillory



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Introduction

Workplace spirituality provides a holistic umbrella that compatibly embraces the totality of work-related activities which are sourced from one's inner self. Whether these activities are initiatives involving diversity, performance management, employee-engagement, work-life integration, or creativity, innovation, and imagination, there is a spiritual dimension to their application in the workplace. In addition, as a result of increasing populations of employees from a variety of backgrounds, cultures, and religions, accommodations for styles of dress, manner of keeping their hair, diets, praying, fasting, language, and observance of holidays have become major issues involving workplace spirituality. This discussion will show how spirituality and religion differ. These differences are further illustrated by a model of the Domains of Consciousness and a Systems-Thinking Model that shows the source of spiritual behaviors. Expressions of spirituality in the workplace are presented as well as a proactive approach to achieving religious accommodation to major dimensions of religion in the workplace. The everyday interactions we have with co-workers is proposed as the most powerful acts of spirituality in the workplace—when those interactions are small acts of transformation[®]. Finally, I propose an ecumenical approach to spirituality as the most powerful way of accommodating religious activities in the most holistic manner.

Spirituality and Religion

This conversation begins with the quote from Pierre Teilhard de Chardin: "We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience."

This quote implies that spirituality is an inherent part of human existence—with unlimited ways of expressing it. It is part of who we are in whatever ways we participate in life.

One of the most common and profound expressions of spirituality is religion. In fact, the two are sometimes used synonymously in spite of the fact that upon close examination, most of us make a distinction between the two. Words and phrases that are used to describe spirituality (from corporate workshops) are "higher state of being," "intangible," "intuitive," and "cosmic." Whereas, words used to describe religion are "concrete," "rules," "restrictions," and "organization."

Spirituality in the Workplace

By Dr. William A. Guillory



Expert Forum

Additional expressions of spirituality include Tai Chi, yoga, prayer, meditation, passion, commitment, and high performance.

I define spirituality as that which comes from within one's inner self—beyond what we have been programmed to believe and value. These include both genetic and environmental programming. Spirituality is the inner source of wisdom that is reflected in values and behaviors which are both humanistic and performance-oriented. These values include empathy, compassion, humility, and love, as well as inspiration, creativity, and wisdom. (See figure 1 below) Religion is a uniquely organized system of beliefs, practices, and rituals which strongly influence how we live our lives and from which many of us derive meaning and purpose. In reverse, authentic religious acts of submission often serve as vehicles for spiritual experiences, such as, prayer, meditation, and prostration. Spirituality compatibly embraces all religions and forms of worship, as well as spiritualists, those who are unaffiliated, and those who do not have religious beliefs. In summary, spirituality is source and religion is human expression.

The Source of Spiritual Behaviors

It becomes rather obvious that a discussion of workplace spirituality is critically dependent on the definitions or context of the terms spirituality, spiritual, or spirit. Figure 1 helps to clarify how these terms are used in this discussion. The figure is the depiction of two domains of consciousness. Specifically, it defines the bodymind and spiritual realms of consciousness we experience as individuals.

The bodymind consciousness is governed by the laws of physics and the measurable concrete world. Spiritual consciousness is associated with the non-physical world governed by metaphysical laws. The discontinuity line that separates the two realms of consciousness is typical of an individual who has not integrated the two domains of consciousness—primarily, through in-depth personal growth. The arrow describing a channel to the spiritual domain and represents the extent to which integration does or does not exist. The wider the channel, the more a "spiritual motivation" is an inherent part of an individual's moment-to-moment life experiences. An example is an individual who is understanding and tolerant of the shortcomings of others, and is therefore rarely judgmental. In the absence of a permanent channel, the more an individual experiences the two realms as compartmentalized. (I will shortly introduce a model which suggests we live "three personalities" on an everyday basis.)



A Systems-Thinking Approach to Human Compatibility and Spirituality

In spite of the fact that we are naturally spiritual beings, we all inherit a bodymind consciousness programmed for survival. As a result, behaving and performing from a spiritual perspective requires an experiential learning process—which doesn't necessarily come with more birthdays! The essence of this process is learning to distinguish between true and illusionary threats to our survival. Sounds simple on the surface, but in reality, realizing these distinctions and living consistent with this level of consciousness can be quite challenging.

For example, from a historical perspective to the present, individuals and civilizations have sought to prove their religious beliefs are right and others are wrong—at the very least by implication. A most famous example by force and violence is the Crusades. The same can be said of other movements for the domination of economic and political systems. From an individual perspective, a heated argument between two individuals is sometimes perceived as tantamount to a life-threatening situation—and often results in violent encounters. These are examples of a bodymind consciousness programmed to dominantly experience life from a survival perspective. The obvious conclusion we might draw from these observations, with respect to the workplace, is that we require employees who dominantly behave and perform in a compatible and spiritually-driven way in order to have an environment characterized by cooperation, collaboration, and spirituality.

The process of experiencing the transformation from conflicting, survival-driven behaviors to compatibility-driven behaviors to spiritually-driven behaviors is described by the three-cycle diagram, Figure 2: A Systems-Thinking Model of Human Compatibility.

The major value system that characterizes each of the cycles in Figure 2 is described below:

Cycle One: Survival—A Survival-Adaptive Reality

Scarcity

Win/Lose

Competition

Separateness

Polarization

Information is Power

Spirituality in the Workplace

By Dr. William A. Guillory



Expert Forum

Cycle Two: Compatibility—A Humanly Compatible Reality

Respect

Equality

Interdependence

Collaboration

Freedom

Knowledge is Power

Cycle Three: Spirituality—A Creative-Adaptive Reality

Abundance

Connectedness

Exploration

Service

Oneness

Wisdom is Power

In practice, we each spend an average amount of time in each of these realities, depending on the environment. I would suggest that the Compatibility Reality corresponds to inclusion (or an inclusive culture), whereas the Spiritual Reality is not dominant—nor is it necessary to be dominant. However, practically all of the activities of the Compatibility Reality have their source (or state of being) in the Spiritual Reality. In order, words, spirituality is a "state of being" whereas the Compatibility Reality is dominantly a "state of doing"—the two work in tandem. Finally, it interesting to note that knowledge is of the mind and wisdom is of the spirit. As Lao-Tzu, the Chinese philosopher who created Taoism has stated:

To gain a little every day is knowledge. To lose a little every day is wisdom.

Spirituality through Small Acts of Transformation

The most profound expression of spirituality is how we live our lives on a moment-to-moment, day-to-day basis. Reflecting on Figure 2, it is being consciously aware of the amount of time we each spend in Cycles Two and Three: Compatibility and Spirituality. I suggest that the small everyday interactions we have with others—whether interpersonal or virtual—have the greatest impact on positively improving the quality of our relationships. We refer to these interactions as small acts of transformation, when they are done with honesty, integrity, and no expectation in return.

Spirituality in the Workplace

By Dr. William A. Guillory



Expert Forum

Small acts include being understanding of the shortcomings of others; sharing homework assignments; focusing more on cooperation than competition; keeping your word when you make a promise; acknowledging others in preference to yourself; using "we" more than "I;" doing something that exceeds your major customer's expectations; avoid gossiping about others; doing a monthly email thanks to those who contribute most to your success; being an example of the expectations you have of others; choosing someone to experience "collaborative learning;" selecting a student/colleague who is struggling and offer to mentor for him/her; learning a new skill every two weeks; and finally, saying "thank you" more often and really meaning it!

I define transformation as an "irreversible change" in an individual's mind-set that is reflected in behaviors of understanding, compassion, and support—such as those cited above. This transformation is also reflective of the increasing quality of relationship—which is the essence of the culture that exists between two individuals. Using the Six Degrees of Separation and the Three Degrees of Influence Rules from Social Networking, the quality of a primary relationship can be expanded through viral dissemination. The former rule states, people worldwide are connected to each other by an average of "six degrees of separation"—or for an organization, more like two to three people. The latter rule states, we influence two other individuals, beyond our primary relationship, within a given organization (or social network).

In practice, these rules have the power to transform the quality of relationships between individuals, among co-workers, and within an organization. The quality of relationships is synonymous with the existing culture. Therefore, using small incremental, everyday acts of support with those we work with provides the opportunity to transform the workplace culture. Small acts that create transformation are, by nature, spiritual.

The process I have described provides a role for every employee to participate in the process of creating inclusion through cultural transformation. It complements the efforts of leadership and management in leading this process. The end-state objective of this spirituality-driven process is to create an employee-supportive workplace where all employees experience equitable opportunity for mainstream participation and personal success.

Coming Down to Earth—Workplace Applications of Spirituality

Spirituality in the Workplace

By Dr. William A. Guillory



Expert Forum

In general, I define workplace applications of spirituality as those that originate within one's inner spiritual self. The following examples are common expressions of spirituality within the United States working environment.

1. Prayer Groups

Among various federal agencies and throughout the corporate world, "prayer groups" are very prevalent and popular. Although each group has its own format, they are usually organized around a specific religion. These are, generally, individuals with strong religious beliefs who believe they have the right to bring their whole self to the workplace—body, mind, and spirit. They usually meet once a week for an hour.

A specific group I interviewed indicated they met once a week from 12:30 to 1:30 pm. Many of the groups form spontaneously, with or without formal leadership sanction. The format of this particular group was a prayer at the beginning of each meeting, followed by the discussion of a verse from the Bible, and ending with another prayer. The verse involved a discussion of how Jesus Christ lived and how each person could practice similar behaviors in their day-to-day interactions with others.

The group discussion also involved support and encouragement to employees struggling with personal issues such as a difficult boss, subtle practices of discrimination, and simply some guidance from others about career advancement. The gray area for group members was "proselytizing." Discussing their beliefs with other employees during working hours—both when asked or simply in conversation with other employees—while workplace responsibilities were set aside. There appears to be great resistance to such activities among the broad base of all employees. They point out the number of different religious representations and that such practices could lead to chaos; particularly, during workplace activities.

Other religious groups, such as Jews and Muslims, are also allowed to pray during work hours. The American Stock Exchange has a Torah group.

2. Creative Visualization

Spirituality in the Workplace

By Dr. William A. Guillory



Expert Forum

Creative visualization utilizes the power of imagination as the source that initiates the process of achieving any goal, objective, or condition an individual may desire. This inner desire involves a five-step process as defined by the book *The Complete IDIOT'S Guide to Creative Visualization*:

- 1) Imagination—creation of a goal, condition, or an objective, e.g., inclusion.
- 2) Focus—creation of a visual picture of this vision in form, e.g., people compatibly working together.
- 3) Belief—experience of the vision already having occurred, e.g., a feeling of contentment and accomplishment.
- 4) Consciousness—awareness of experiences of achievement and challenge throughout the process, e.g., productive and counterproductive cultural encounters.
- 5) Affirmation—positive declaration of achievement throughout the process, e.g., "Support the success of others."

The power of this spiritual expression is setting aside skepticism, adopting a strong belief of success (confidence in one's self), and practice—practice, practice.

3. Personal Stability, Centeredness, and Self-Actualization

One or more of these conditions describe how many individuals adapt to the chaotically changing work environment. Adaptation may involve time-out for meditation, introspection, affirmation, a short walk, journaling, or sharing with a trusted friend. These spiritual expressions provide the realization that stability, centeredness, and self-actualization are sourced from our inner self—particularly since we have little or no control of our workplace environment or the people in it. Therefore, change is an external occurrence and adaptation is an internal process of personal and sometimes spiritual transformation. The major activity associated with these expressions is personal growth—the willingness to continually learn through classroom training, conferences, networking, personal introspection, and most of all, the everyday interactions we have with others.

4. Imagination, Creativity, and Innovation

It is my belief that both imagination and creativity do not originate within the mind, but from the inner dimension I have previously described. (Figure 1, page 3). They both literally originate within one's creative consciousness. This source is stimulated by our day-to-day desires and wishes as well as by the necessities of problems and challenges that the workplace (or life) serves. The most prominent advanced techniques for developing the "skills" of imagination and creativity are

Spirituality in the Workplace

By Dr. William A. Guillory



Expert Forum

mind-mapping, sleep-state creativity, and quantum-thinking, for solutions that involve the imagination, visioning, and the creation of new paradigms.

Innovation is putting a creative idea into form, e.g., a new theory, software program, the design of a building, a poem, a musical score, or a solution to a practical problem. The power or impact of innovation is in direct proportion to one's knowledge base about a subject. For example, Albert Einstein had an in-depth knowledge base in physics, mathematics, and astronomy in addition to an ability to integrate that knowledge base to invent "The Theory of Relativity." More often, we use innovation for practical everyday solutions, sometimes with leisure or sometimes out of crisis, e.g., the movie "Apollo 13" is a story of extraordinary innovation driven out of crisis.

5. Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is the ability to influence others in performing to their highest potential based upon an unconditional commitment to their growth, success, and well-being. An unconditional commitment begins with an in-depth understanding of needs, wants, and aspirations, or others; facilitating them in clarifying their goals and objectives based upon their innermost (or spiritually-sourced) values; and mentoring the continuous acquisition of high-performance skills driven from an inner desire to succeed. This form of leadership is not exclusive to title, position, or income. It is a natural desire to support the success of others with no expectation in return.

The most challenging skill associated with transformational leadership is the ability to facilitate the adoption of a mind-set of success in others, regardless of the challenges they may encounter. I emphasize the term facilitate since this ability cannot be taught by a prescribed set of behaviors. A mind-set of success is inclusive of:

1. "An Attitude of Empowerment"—100% responsibility and 100% accountability.
2. "Self-Discipline"—maintaining the success process in spite of distractions and challenges.
3. "Creating Allies"—mutually committed individuals you can depend on for support who are a mirror-reflection of yourself.
4. "A Clear Direction"—the establishment of a measurable goal, with course corrections, that guides the process of continual success.

Spirituality in the Workplace

By Dr. William A. Guillory



Expert Forum

6. Work as Meaning

Given the pressures and demands of the workplace today, practically every generational group, in particular Baby Boomers and Millennials, are asking themselves, "Is this what I want to do with my life?" "Does this activity provide me with a sense of joy, passion, and contribution to others?" These are obviously "inner-space" questions. They are personal to each individual. As many Baby Boomers delay their retirement, they grow more reflective about their workplace activities, its value to customers, and their contribution in terms of social responsibility. In a like manner, one of the major workplace values of Millennials is "to make a difference in the world condition," by what they do. This value is very influential in terms of the choices they make for prospective employers as well as the type of job they accept—in spite of the job market. Fortunately, they are also idealistic and optimistic!

7. Organizational Commitment to Spirituality in the Workplace

Tyson Foods, Inc., Springdale, Arkansas has established a Tyson Center for Faith and Spirituality at Walton College. The objective of the Center is to produce business executives with certificates in leadership, and faith and spirituality. It is suggested that organizations which are spiritual and faith-friendly are more likely to have higher levels of job satisfaction, higher levels of customer service, greater innovation, and lower turnover and absenteeism. The organization placed 128 part-time chaplains in 78 Tyson plants beginning in 2006. Their responsibilities included being available for counseling, bereavement situations, and spiritual development. Other examples include Xerox and Ford sponsoring spiritual retreats and Vision Quests for greater creativity and innovation; Microsoft's online spiritual service; Apple Computers' spiritual rooms for meditation and prayer to improve productivity and creativity; Sounds True providing extra vacation days for spiritual interests; Patagonia's yoga class on company time; The World Bank's Spiritual Unfoldment Society; Marriott's day off for their "Spirit to Serve" the local community; and Timberland's extra pay to employees up to 40 hours a year for community service work.

8. Work-Life Integration

The essence of work-life integration is the realization that one's work and personal life are inseparable. The objective for personal quality, balance, and spiritual centeredness is to learn how to integrate one's most important activities. These most important activities are based upon one's innermost (spiritual) values.

Spirituality in the Workplace

By Dr. William A. Guillory



Expert Forum

Common choices participant's make from our workshops are family, service, leadership, significant other, faith, teamwork, self, etc. In essence, quality of life is result of focusing on activities sourced from one's spiritual values and work-life balance is the result of managing these activities in an integrated manner, based upon necessity, practicality, efficiency, and spontaneity.

9. Spirituality and Social Responsibility

Social responsibility is a form of organizational self-accountability for the welfare of the environment in which an organization operates. Although social responsibility is often connected to long-term bottom-line profitability, those organizations and individuals that authentically practice it are driven by an inner desire to care for people, communities, and the environment. True social responsibility is borne from the realization that humans, animals, and the environment exists in an intricate web of interrelationships. For example, if we pollute the water and environment in which we live, too often for additional profit, we simultaneously endanger our own existence through the food chain. In contrast, socially responsible organizations feel a natural obligation to support the development and welfare of the communities in which they operate. For example, Toyota Financial Services has an established program to assist the educational needs of the Hispanic Community of southern California through the Office of the Vice-President of Social Responsibility. Other prominent organizations that have long been driven by this natural desire include Patagonia, Timberland Shoes, Tom's of Maine, Ben and Jerry's Ice Cream, and Stoneyfield Farm Yogurt.

10. Spirituality—People, Performance, and Profitability

The essence of this application of spirituality is very simple; sustained profitability, over time, is the natural result of ensuring the physical, mental, and spiritual welfare of employees and providing the tools and the environment to maximize their performance. At the risk of sounding too simplistic, the point I am making is that when employees experience a leader or a manager who truly cares about them as human beings, the response is exceptional performance—even beyond expectations. Two former CEOs I have experienced who exemplify this statement are Jack Lowe, Jr. of TDIndustries and Herb Kellerman of Southwest Airlines. Both of their organizations were in the top five lists of The 100 Best Companies to Work for in America for more than five consecutive years; often trading the top position. I cite this award because it is one that is achieved by the response of the work force. Jack, for an example, would repeatedly state, "We must embrace diversity, first and foremost, because it is right." Then he would proceed with the productivity and business drivers. He also often stated that treating people with

Spirituality in the Workplace

By Dr. William A. Guillory



Expert Forum

dignity and respect was a condition for employment at TD Industries—and he meant it! Herb Kellerman is quoted to have said, "A company is stronger if it is bound by love rather than by fear." He also stated, "Your people come first, and if you treat them right, they treat the customer right."

An Integrated Approach to Spirituality in the Workplace

I propose the establishment of an Ecumenical Council on Spirituality in the Workplace within an organization, inclusive of all represented religions, to discuss and recommend to a diversity team and/or leadership equitable practices involving:

- a. Frequency and types of daily prayers in the workplace.
- b. Dress code inclusive of cultural and religious attire
- c. Ecumenical meditation room(s)
- d. Religious prayer room(s)
- e. Policy on proselytizing in the workplace
- f. Ways to foster equitable inclusion of atheists, agnostics, spiritualists, and religious personnel
- g. Ways to foster greater integrative performance, productivity, and employee well-being through religious and philosophical (i.e., Taoism and Buddhism) differences.

In other words, I propose a proactive approach to addressing spirituality in the workplace that integrates religious and philosophical differences—without losing one's religious uniqueness—to achieve human compatibility rather than separation; obviously with the advice and consent of an organization's legal department.

An approach which focuses primarily on religion, such as "Religion in the Workplace," or proposes that spirituality and religion are identical will simply reenact how religions presently operate in society and globally. Although religious groups tend to be communal in terms of primarily associating with those who have similar values and religious beliefs, the only way national and global compatibility will occur is through reconciling group values and beliefs with those who are different through human interaction—this is the true meaning of diversity and inclusion. This goal cannot be achieved through separation, or even worse, isolation. The present state of a majority of institutions, organizations, and the world situation today is testimony to the previous statement.

Spirituality in the Workplace

By Dr. William A. Guillory



Expert Forum

1. A Proactive Approach to Religious Accommodation in the Workplace—An Employee Toolbox

Examples of a proactive approach to achieving religious accommodation in the workplace, from an employee's perspective, are listed below:

Example One:

Religious Dimension: Requesting a Religious Accommodation

Objective of the Accommodation: Meet religious obligations; live consistent with a "sincerely-held" religious belief; and ensure equitable treatment and opportunity for success.

Three Proactive Employee Behaviors:

1. Request a religious accommodation as early as possible after a new appointment or when it becomes necessary.
2. Provide a clear explanation of the religious accommodation based upon your required religious practices and rituals.
3. Suggest how the accommodation might be accomplished and still meet workplace responsibilities and obligations.

Example Two:

Religious Dimension: Religious Accommodation for Prayer, Meditation, or Personal Stability

Objective of the Accommodation: Provide opportunities for adaptation to workplace pressures as well as religious obligations.

Three Proactive Employee Behaviors:

1. Establish prayer meetings as a separate religion and with other religious groups—with equal participation.
2. In mixed religious meetings, share workplace challenges associated with religious practices and possible solutions.
3. Inform your supervisor and explain how your prayer group participation will not interfere with your workplace responsibilities.

Example Three:

Spirituality in the Workplace

By Dr. William A. Guillory



Expert Forum

Religious Dimension: Avoiding Religious Harassment in the Workplace

Objective of the Accommodation: Create a workplace free of religious hostility, intimidation, and retaliation.

Three Proactive Employee Behaviors:

1. Demonstrate your religious principles by how open, tolerant, and accepting you are of others' point of view.
2. Think twice before telling religious (or other discriminatory) jokes or comments in the workplace.
3. Practice, as a habit, religious-neutral behaviors—avoidance of religious or religious-motivated conduct for disparate treatment—particularly supervisors, who have influence, power, and decision-making authority.

Example Four:

Religious Dimension: Religious Proselytizing in the Workplace

Objective of the Accommodation: Establish behavioral guidelines for appropriate religious proselytizing in the workplace.

Three Proactive Employee Behaviors:

1. Share activities that are religious-related, where appropriate; the same as non-religious activities.
2. Share what a sermon meant to you in terms of working more compatibly and efficiently with others in your workplace.
3. Be sensitive to your co-worker who may not be interested or receptive to (1) and (2) above. (Avoid unwanted advances)

Example Five:

Religious Dimension: Establishing an Equitable Religious Holiday Arrangement

Objective of the Accommodation: Discussion of how a more equitable religious holidays accommodation might be arranged.

Three Proactive Employee Behaviors:

1. Offer to switch holidays with co-workers.
2. In shared religious meetings, explain to others the meaning and importance of your religious holidays. (You may discover you have more in common than differences.)
3. Consider prioritizing holidays that can't be accommodated by vacation days, major government holidays, or local state holidays.

Example Six:

Religious Dimension: Religious Clothing or Personal Appearance in the Workplace

Spirituality in the Workplace

By Dr. William A. Guillory



Expert Forum

Objective of the Accommodation: To discuss a compelling case for religious clothing and appearance that does not cause a safety hazard.

Three Proactive Employee Behaviors:

1. Share with co-workers why your clothing or personal appearance is an important religious necessity—not convince them.
2. Explain why such clothing or your personal appearance will not cause a safety hazard.
3. Ensure, as best you can, why such clothing or appearance is not offensive to co-workers; but has important meaning in your own religious belief system.

Example Seven:

Religious Dimension: Religious Symbols in the Workplace

Objective of the Accommodation: To discuss appropriate display of symbolism in the workplace.

Three Proactive Employee Behaviors:

1. Display religious symbols in your workplace solely for your own private viewing.
2. Wear religious symbols in size and content that serves your needs and that does not pretend to represent your organization.
3. In external customer situations, be aware and sensitive to how your customer will probably respond to your appearance where symbols are concerned.

2. Ten Ways to Integrate Spirituality in Your Life

1. First and foremost, embrace personal growth as life's opportunity for acquiring greater wisdom.
2. When you experience personal (or workplace) conflict, reflect inwardly for the source of your reactive emotion(s)—discover your unmet expectation as the source.
3. Compare your personal values with your organization's practiced values. If significantly out of alignment, attempt to understand and resolve the disparity.
4. Commit to one or two personal growth activities per month, e.g., self-help books or tapes, seminars or workshops, local support groups, etc.
5. Create a personal development program that enhances your career development plan, e.g., seminars on relationship, communication, leadership, teamwork, diversity, and creativity.
6. Adopt a personally appropriate spiritual practice that connects you to your inner wisdom, e.g., Yoga, meditation, prayer, Zen, visualization, dream journaling, etc.

Spirituality in the Workplace

By Dr. William A. Guillory



Expert Forum

7. Take 10 minutes each morning and afternoon to center yourself with respect to workplace or life's activities.
8. Become aware if you waste your personal or organization's resources (without permission), e.g., food, water, electricity, pencils, paper, fax, copies, phone time, work time on personal matters—your personal integrity.
9. Be more compassionate and non-judgmental of the shortcomings of others.
10. Practice ways of contributing to others or your community with no expected recognition, reward, or profit.

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