

CONFLICT PRINCIPLES NECESSARY IN PREPARATION
FOR PASTORAL MINISTRY

A Paper

Presented to

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for 96400 Change, Power, and Conflict

by

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September 15, 2003

Research Purpose Statement

Based on casual observation, one criticism of theological education at Southern Seminary and Moody Bible Institute from the 1980's to mid 1990's is the need to address educational issues that are directly relevant to pastoral ministry. One such issue is dealing biblically with conflict. This study will explore aspects of conflict that were not addressed in leadership classes in the bachelor and masters' level courses that will better prepare an individual for pastoral ministry within the local church. This paper will become a launch pad for a course development on conflict ministry in the local church. Secondly it will be an expanded analysis of a dysfunctional church in Defoe, Kentucky, where the author was pastor for a short time. The intent will be to compare the literature with my experience.

Delimitations of the Study

The study will be delimited to select writings listed in the reference list with specific attention given to the writings of David Augusburger, Edward G. Dobson, Speed B. Leas, and Marshall Shelley, Kenneth O. Gangel, and Samuel L. Canine, H. Newton Malony, D.G. McCoury, Larry McSwain and William Treadwell, Jr., and Ken Sande.

Research Questions

What aspects of single staff ministry should be taught in a church leadership class?
What principles should be taught in ministering to problem people in the church?
What are the most predictable times for conflict in the local church?
What strategies are available for resolving personal conflict?
How are problems and conflict different?

Terminology

Single-staff church: "These churches may have a full-time pastor who lives on the field. Some of them are served by a bivocational pastor. Others are pastored by part-time ministers serving other single-staff churches, a volunteer, a part-time person, or a bivocational minister might serve as minister of music, minister of youth, minister of education, or a combination

of these positions” (McCoury 1988, 4).

Family-Chapel Church: “The family-chapel church averages less than sixty persons in attendance. This church carries the name ‘family chapel’ for several reasons. First, it functions frequently as an extended family. This church has a family heritage and a powerful father/mother (patriarch/matriarch) figures. Newcomers-if there are any-are usually “adopted” into this family (McCoury 1988, 26).

Single Cell: “This term means the family-chapel church does not have a complex organization. All participants identify as part of the whole, not as part of a subdivision of the whole. Typically, events involve the whole body, directly or indirectly, not just one segment of the church. Who is more important than what. Members relate to one another in economic, family, social, and community roles as well as in church roles” (McCoury 1988, 26).

Patriarch/Matriarch: This individual is the key to the administrative nature of the family-chapel church.

Collective-Alliance Church: This pastor is in the opposite position of the family chapel. “The key to the collective-alliance church is the pastor. The collective-alliance pastor develops the administration” (McCoury 1988, 37).

Equipped-Leader Church: “In this concept, you see the pastor, deacons, and volunteer leaders as a part of the church’s leadership team. In this model the pastor is the leader of the leaders. This church leadership team equips each member of the church to be on mission. Thus, the pastor is the equippier of the equippers” (McCoury 1988, 51).

The University Church: “where the emphasis is on teaching, learning, and doctrine” (Mims 2001, 25). The key is instruction and the pastor is viewed as a professor.

The Arena Church: “worship-centered, where performance and entertainment are key” (Mims 2001, 25). The key is experience and the pastor is viewed as a performer.

The Corporate Church: “large, complex, intricate and model of efficiency” (Mims 2001, 25). The key is vision and the pastor is viewed as CEO.

The Machine Church: “program-oriented, focused on building, missions, and task management” (Mims 2001, 25). The key is keeping the established programs running and the pastor is viewed as a manager.

The Family Chapel: “based on family ties, where personal relationships come first” (Mims 2001, 25). The key is personal relationships within the church and the pastor is viewed as a chaplain.

The Legacy Church: “rich in tradition, often focused on a great event or personality of the past” (Mims 2001, 25). The key is the history of the church and the pastor is viewed as curator of a museum.

The Community Center Church: “committed to community service and local issues” (Mims 2001, 25). The key is current issues and the pastor is viewed as a prophet because he spends time analyzing society.

**Union Baptist Church, Defoe, Kentucky August 1991-February 1992
(What aspects of single staff ministry should be taught in a church leadership class?)**

Union Baptist Church is a rural Southern Baptist congregation in Defoe, KY. Members of this congregation included farmers who grew tobacco, a few who worked in a whiskey distillery, (neither vocations were adequately resolved in my mind) and a few who worked for the state government in Frankfort. Hindsight being 20/20 and after reading McCoury and Mims, I now have a better understanding of the dynamics of Union Baptist Church. Union was a single-staff, family chapel with a twist of a quasi collective-alliance church. Quasi being that the pastor was not the key individual organizing the ministry. This collective-alliance/family chapel was between a group of individuals lead by two men with their families and those they had extended influence over.

Understanding that Mims did not write his text until 2001 and McCoury in 1988, it would have been helpful to have had such information before embarking upon this journey. I was not aware of these texts, this style of analysis of single and multiple staff churches until late 2002, ten years after my demise in Defoe. Neither seminary training nor Bible school education equipped me for the conflict I would endure in a six-month period.

I interviewed for the pastoral position at Union in July. I admit I was young, inexperienced and naïve enough to believe that because I was pastor, the church would naturally and gladly follow my lead. That naiveté was eroded within a few short weeks. During the interview process, I stated that I used a New American Standard Version of the Bible in my preaching and teaching. I specifically asked if that would be a problem. I was told that would be

no problem. Unfortunately, history would prove otherwise.

We moved into a home in Defoe rented from a family member of one the leaders of the quasi collective-alliance. My first Sunday as pastor, as I walked into the front entrance of the church with Sam (one of the deacons), he looked and said “If they run you off, I’m leaving too.” Red flags, bells and whistles went off in my mind as I entered the church questioning what I had gotten myself into. The honeymoon was short and the buzz saw was preparing to cut its teeth on me.

I found out early on that I was the sixth pastor this church had in ten years. I realized that there would be problems no matter what. Apparently there would be no appeasing or satisfying a segment of the church. This leads me to the second question of what principles should be taught to pastors in ministering to problem people in the church?

Necessary Principle: Understand the dynamics of the church context. “Catagorizing churches by types is useful in analyzing why a church is what it is. Church categories explain how to relate to a church’s leaders, members, and mission” (McCoury 1988, 5). I sought to minister as an equipped leader or a university pastor to a congregation that was a combination of Family Chapel, Patriarch and quasi Collective Alliance. We spoke but were not successful at communication with each other. I thought I was the pastor but in reality I was a chaplain. Another very important principle is to understand one’s leadership and management style because if the pastor’s style and the church’s style are significantly different conflict can erupt.

What principles should be taught in identifying problem people in the church?

Marshall Shelley has written an excellent text that should be must reading for every pastor and those studying to become one. *Well Intentioned Dragons* is a text that effectively

categorizes problem people. It gives pastors a better handle on identifying, handling or managing and ministering to difficult people. In Chapter Two Shelley identifies a number of dragons. First is the *Bird Dog*. This is an individual who views their ministry to point out things the pastor needs to be doing. “The two-legged Bird Dog loves to be the pastor’s eyes, ears and nose, sniffing out items for attention” (Shelley 1985, 37).

The *Wet Blanket* is the one who spreads negativity on all initiatives. “We’ve never done it this way before” or “we tried that before and it didn’t work” are familiar phrases. The *Entrepreneur* is the opposite of the Wet Blanket because this individual is enthusiastic. The problem is that the Entrepreneur desires to be friendly for the ulterior motive of trying to sell products to benefit the Entrepreneur.

Captain Bluster is one who knows little to no tact. Captain Bluster is always right and often “speaks with an exclamation point instead of a period” (Shelley 1985, 39). This person is a steamroller or bulldozer, flattening and covering anyone who gets in the way. The *Fickle Financier* uses money to leverage their position and to express approval or disapproval regarding church decisions. The *Busybody* is expert on everything and enjoys telling everyone how to do their jobs. The *Sniper* “avoids face-to-face conflict but picks off pastors with pot shots in private conversation, such as the cryptic “Be sure to pray for our pastor. He has some problems, you know”” (Shelley 1985, 40). The *Bookkeeper* keeps records of all alleged infractions by the pastor and the *Merchant of Muck* “breeds dissatisfaction by attracting others who know he’s more than willing to listen to, and elaborate on, things that are wrong in the church” (Shelley 1985, 40). The *Legalist* sees everything in black and white with a list of dos and don’ts that can even include the type of car the pastor can drive.

Duard was the prominent leader of the collective-alliance. He was a sniper. His attacks

were never direct and when I found out he was dissatisfied with my use of the New American Standard version claiming that it was not the “Bible,” I paid him a visit one evening. Since snipers avoid face to face encounters, he was uncomfortable and claimed that he did not have a problem with my leadership, preaching or Bible version. That was however not the case.

When we initially moved to Defoe we rented a house that was owned by a relative of Duard, the sniper. It was not long after my meeting with Him that I received a phone call from my landlord saying that he did not want the dog or the rabbit in the house. I told him that he knew I had pets when we moved in. He said that he had someone who wanted to rent a house. I told him to do what he felt he had to do. When I hung up the phone I called Chester, a supportive deacon whom I am still friends with today. I told Chester that he and the deacons would have to find me a place to live. I informed him of the conversation with the landlord and that we would be forced to leave the house we were currently residing. A house was found and we moved the week before Thanksgiving. We had only been on the field for a little over two months.

Shelley has a section titled *Habitations of Dragons*. In this section he informs the reader of where dragons are more likely to emerge. It is not to create suspicion or distrust, but to “clarify some of the dynamics of potential conflict.”

According to Shelley the worst dragon may be the pastor’s initial and strongest supporter. This proved true in my experience at Union. I recall the day I preached and was interviewed by the church. Jim invited us over for lunch. After lunch he opened his deep freeze and gave us a large quantity of meat. Wow, we couldn’t believe how nice he was and the friendliness of the church.

“Dragons often work overhard initially at befriending you” (Shelley 1985, 43). This was

also true in my “Union” experience. Jim invited us over to his home early on. He showed us his stables and horses. Dragons are also likely to compare the current pastor to the previous pastor. “Dragons thrive when the church’s formal authority and informal power structure don’t match” (Shelley 1985, 44). Dragons can arise as a result of counseling. If the pastor knows too many personal problems about a person or family, he can then become a target.

Shelley states that dragons have often sensed a call to the ministry at one time. I recall one dragon at a church in Highland, Indiana, who vocalized his sense of call. Instead of venturing out and seeking to affirm that call, he sought to unseat the current pastor so he could pastor the church. This dragon’s destructiveness resulted in the pastor ultimately leaving.

The last straw for me at Union was when I received a phone call one evening from Jim. He didn’t understand how he was being used by others in the church to do their dirty work. I recall being told that there were members dissatisfied that I had a dog and a rabbit as pets and did not appreciate that I bought a new car (even though the car was a demonstrator with 20,000 miles). I was also told that a petition was being circulated to have me removed as pastor. I was getting ready to move a fourth time in six months.

Shelley’s advice is when being attacked by a dragon to not become one. It is easy to attack when one is attacked and to defend oneself from unfair and inaccurate attacks. In retrospect, maybe I should have called their bluff and forced this disgruntled group to show themselves. I view my ministry there as helping free individuals who for whatever reason could not leave on their own. I resigned the next Sunday to take effect a few weeks later. When I resigned I looked straight at Jim. I was so angry and sad. I recall slamming my fist on to the pulpit saying “I am amazed that there are those telling me how I am to spend the money God gives me.” Jim jumped as if he had been shot and Chester just grinned. To add insult to injury

between the time when I resigned on Sunday morning to the evening when I returned for the evening service one of the dragons had taken my name off the church sign.

I never encouraged anyone else to leave. I specifically stated that individuals had to do what God wanted them to do. In the end a number of families resigned and left the church. Like Sam months earlier told me he would leave if they ran me off, a number of older and mature Christians resigned positions and left. I resigned and we moved back to Louisville and completed the final year of my M Div studies and ministered informally at Lyndon Baptist Church where we found rest and healing.

Necessary Principle: Understand the people you are dealing with and ministering to. I walked into a power struggle within the church totally unprepared. Paul Wilson, a former pastor and friend, said “small churches are small for a reason-they like it that way. Casual observation from my experience in at least a seven small Southern Baptist Churches, most of which are located in Northwest Indiana, is that small churches easily demonstrate dysfunction and the center isle becomes a “line in the sand” between the two strongest factions.

I was also “used” to an extent by “well-intentioned dragons,” good people in the church who wanted to see genuine change. My biggest mistake was allowing the deacons to flip the worship and Sunday school hours one Sunday for the wrong reasons. There were individuals in the church who held positions of leadership whose lives demonstrated they were unqualified for the positions they held. These individuals taught Sunday school and consistently left after the Sunday school hour. They used the time as a platform to espouse their views and to stir up controversy. The deacons should have stepped into this and either removed the individuals from teaching or at minimum sat into the classes to ensure that the lesson was being studied.

What are the most predictable times for conflict in the local church?

Speed Leas is coauthor of *Mastering Conflict & Controversy* and in this text he offers a chapter titled *The Ten Most Predictable Times of Conflict*. “Pastors know that church conflict is coming. Knowing when it’s apt to come is a different matter and one that pastors are wise to be alert to” (Dobson, Leas & Shelley 1992, 109). The following are the ten most predictable times of conflict by Leas as bullet points

- Easter- Leas identifies calls for help increase 28 percent at the Alban Institute.
- Stewardship Campaigns/Budget Times- during annual stewardship emphasis complaints about the church can rise.
- Addition of New Staff- new staff means changes in relationships and procedures as well as changes in directions and priorities.
- Change in Leadership Style- When congregations are used to one style of leadership and a new leader uses a different style than the congregation is used to.
- The Pastor’s Vacation- When a church is too dependent upon the pastor, conflict can arise in the pastor’s absence as in during a vacation.
- Changes in the Pastor’s Family- The addition of a new baby or the transition to the teen years can cause conflict if the church has been conditioned to a pastor working seventy to eighty hours a week and he cuts back to fifty or sixty hours.
- Introduction of Baby Boomers into the Congregation- this is dated but the principle of boomers, busters and Gen X’ers whose lifestyle, and politics can be completely different from the builders can cause friction.
- The Completion of a New Building- Casual observation and research at the Alban Institute reflect that pastors are subject to firing after the completion of a building project. The church and leadership need to learn to transition from the energies expended for building to energies expended toward the reasons the building was built.
- Loss of Membership- Conflict is more likely when the church experiences the loss of membership because that usually means a decrease in funds, and or people in programs.
- Increase in Membership- In the case of small church an increase in membership can upset the power balance in a family chapel or Patriarch/Matriarch setting.

Necessary Principle: Speed Leas says; “One of the major reasons businesses fail (or decline) is that they cannot readily adapt to their changing environments” (Dobson, Leas & Shelley 1992, 31). Conflict has its benefits. Speed Leas identifies the benefits of conflict as issues being explored fully, better decisions are made, and people are more committed to decisions when there is healthy conflict causing people to reflect and know why they are doing what they do.

Leas offers suggestions on fostering healthy conflict through asking questions because some may think they know enough or some may believe that they already know what the other wants or they may be unaware of changing conditions or fail to see weaknesses in a specific position. Conflict is at times necessary and beneficial. It is also unavoidable due to human depravity.

What strategies are available for resolving personal conflict?

The following principles come from *Communication and Conflict Management in Churches and Christian Organizations* by Kenneth Gangel and Sammuel Canine and the *Peacemaker* by Ken Sade. Sade views conflict as a slippery slope and sees three major responses to conflict; escape, conciliation, and attack. The escape responses are suicide, flight and denial. Conciliation responses which Sade defines as peace-making are to overlook, discussion, negotiation, mediation, arbitration and church discipline. Finally the attack responses are litigation, assault and murder.

Gangel and Canine refer to Putnam and Wilson's text *Communication Strategies in Organizational Conflicts: Reliability and Validity of a Measurement Scale* and observe three major conflict management styles; nonconfrontation, solution-oriented and control. Nonconfrontation demonstrates some alignment with Sade's escape responses and the conciliation response of overlooking the offence. This individual uses indirect strategies such as avoidance, withdraw, silence, glossing over or concealing ill feelings. Solution-oriented demonstrates alignment with Sade's Conciliation responses. The solution-oriented individual is direct in communication with the aim of finding a solution and integrating the needs of all affected parties. The Control style resembles Sade's attack response. This individual will use direct communication like the dragon *Captain Bluster* to bulldoze taking a control position.

Positive characteristics of non-confrontation understand what battles are worth fighting. It is asking does this conflict make a difference in light of eternity. Do I have an agenda regarding the issue in question?

McSwain and Treadwell in *Conflict Ministry in the Church* discuss response styles to conflict. The *problem solver* is “the individual who works within conflict to bring forth the best possible conclusion for all of the parties engaged in friction” (McSwain and Treadwell 1981, 171). This individual is not afraid of conflict and works to maintain a high level of trust. Conflict is viewed as a failure in communication. The weakness of this position is that problem solving does not lend itself in situations where emotions are explosive or goals are mutually exclusive. It also is dependent upon a level of maturity of those in conflict.

The *super-helper* is one who constantly works with others with no regard for self. The super-helper is particularly helpful to those in intrapersonal conflicts because they can be good listeners. The weakness of this position is the imbalance between love for God, neighbor and self. This person can be so helpful to others and neglectful of self so as to quickly burn out.

The *power-broker* “uses the power available to achieve his or her goals in a specific situation” (McSwain and Treadwell 1981, 175). The power-broker is necessary when factions are entrenched and divided on an issue that someone must apply enough force for resolution. This style of leadership is high task and low relationship. This person has a strong decisive personality and does not trust others readily. According to McSwain and Treadwell, this style is effective in blue-collar church where membership is composed of individuals conditioned to directive supervision. Congregations used to more democratic decision making will have a difficult time adjusting to this style.

The *facilitator* is “highly adaptive to a variety of situations and styles. The facilitator is

one who does not function from a primary style, but shifts from a style to style, depending upon the situation. The primary method of the facilitator is to seek a compromise between competing factions” (McSwain and Treadwell 1981, 177). A facilitator will also tend to be a situational leader. According to McSwain and Treadwell compromise is the most effective means of solving conflict when the differences are feelings or attitudinal. The more deeply held the issue the more difficult a compromise will be. The problem-solver and facilitator engage in a balanced perspective between relationship and task concerns, however the facilitator adapts various styles of conflict leadership to seek resolution. The major weakness is a facilitator settling at the lowest common denominator rather than lead to consensus.

The *fearful loser* runs from conflict. “This style is one of passivity/withdrawal” (McSwain and Treadwell 1981, 179). This individual does everything to avoid engaging conflict. For this individual “conflict creates such intense personal insecurity the lowest risks are to be found in ignoring conflict for as long as possible” (McSwain and Treadwell 1981, 179). Ignoring conflict or seeking to suppress it will create more conflict. According to McSwain and Treadwell the leadership style of the fearful loser has low concern for both relationships and tasks. This individual withdraws from responsibilities and relationships. This causes conflict within the church because the church questions “what is the pastor doing?”

Gangel and Canine study the scriptures and outline principles from various books. The following is a synopsis of their principles in bullet points regarding principles of conflict observed in Proverbs.

- At times conflict is best managed by avoiding it- 1:10-19, 22-33. This avoidance is based in understanding whether the conflict is worth the effort and the ability to overlook the faults of others.
- When God’s children reduce their conflict with the Lord, they find even their enemies are at peace with them- 16:7. This principle finds alignment with Malony (later discussed) who views conflict as more internal than external. When an individual struggles in their

relationship with God other relationships will be in conflict also.

- We are personally responsible to control our tempers- 16:32. Jesus stated that it is not what enters the body that brings defilement but what comes out because what comes out is from the heart.
- Wisdom dictates that we manage conflict in its early stages- 17:14.
- In any conflict situation hear all sides- 18:17.
- A mutually agreed upon third party or (method) can help manage the conflict- 18:18. This is in agreement with Sade's principles regarding mediation and arbitration.
- Some conflicts are not worth the fight- 19:11. This is in agreement with Sade's point of overlooking an offense.
- By doing something good (nice) for the person we are having conflict with, we reduce destructive conflict- 21:14. Jesus spoke of being kind to your enemy.
- Be slow to involve yourself in a quarrel that is not your own- 26:17.
- Destructive conflict must be fed to continue its existence- 26:20-21.

Necessary Principle:

Conflict is necessary and is used by God to develop one's character. Speed Leas has said "unless an organization encourages regular and thorough internal challenge to what it has been doing, it's unlikely to be able to keep up with the changing world" (Dobson, Leas & Shelley 1992, 29). It is also necessary for a pastor to know and develop his leadership style and his conflict management style. Marshall Shelley quotes Stewart Briscoe saying "qualifications for a pastor: the mind of a scholar, the heart of a child and the hide of a rhinoceros" (Shelley 1985, 35). If a pastor doesn't develop his leadership and conflict management styles, he will condemn himself to being a fearful loser unsuccessful in leading the church against the gate of Hell.

William Mike Smith provided a *Listening Guide for Conflict Management* as a part of the class 96400 Change Power and Conflict. Within the listening guide was the Discover Your Conflict Management Style Survey. This survey is part of a text by Speed Leas *Discover Your Conflict Management Style*. This along with the DISC Profile Survey is helpful in understanding one's personality traits and how one manages conflict. These are invaluable tools to help pastors not to be taken unaware when conflict occurs. Smith states: "how you manage conflict often determines how much conflict you experience" (Smith 2003, 13).

How are problems and conflict different?

H. Newton Malony has written *Win-Win Relationships: 9 Strategies for Settling Personal Conflicts Without Waging War*. Malony has demonstrated a difference between problems and conflict. He states “problems are concerned with ideas; conflicts with feelings....Conflicts are personal, individual experiences while problems are social, interindividual experiences” (Malony 1995, xi). Malony writes that conflicts exist inside people and problems are situational. Conflicts are personal and problems exist outside of us in the world. Maloney’s working definition of a problem is: “Problems are differences of opinions about the ways, the means, or the ends of dealing with real-life issues” (Malony 1995, 6). Ends are differences on what is to be done. Ways are differences on how something is to be done and means are differences on what resources are to be used.

He says “people go into conflict over problems.” Malony continues saying “conflicts occur when people become so upset that they cease being reasonable and react impulsively, defensively, and drastically.” “Conflicts are desperate feelings of threats to one’s self-esteem that can lead to drastic acts of self-defense” (Malony 1995, 9).

Problems are issues of carpet and hymnal color. Problems are issues of differences in what people want to do, how governments choose to open markets to buy products, coverage in a warranty, or differences in the way a preacher delivers a sermon.

So the first key is to understand that conflict is inside a person and problems are between persons who differ over ways, means or ends. Conflicts are when we try to win an argument no matter who gets hurt, or believing some people are so dangerous that they need to be done away with. According to Malony we know we are in conflict when:

- We want to leave and never come back
- We avoid people with whom we were once friendly
- When we let people run over us and pretend we don't care
- When we surrender our point of view when we don't agree

Conflict is a threat to one's self-esteem when the line is crossed between stress and distress and when we do whatever it takes to restore our self-esteem. "Conflict is a state of mind, not an issue of disagreement" (Malony 1995, 14). At Union there were personality differences that lead to conflict in both myself and others. My style of leadership was not compatible with a segment of the church. My self-esteem was threatened and I felt like I had been bulldozed.

Necessary Principle: One way of settling conflict is first knowing what is happening to you on the inside. Conflict is attitudinal. We have a choice on how we are to respond. I recall a statement a pastor once said that has stayed with me. He said "act don't react, attack the problem not the person." Addressing problems rather than personalities will spare us from some conflict.

Outline for Course Development on Change and Conflict in Pastoral Ministry

- I. Understanding the Biblical View of Change and Conflict
 - A. When God initiates Change and Conflict
 - B. When humans initiate Change and Conflict
 - C. Jesus' view of Change and Conflict
 - D. Paul's view of Change and Conflict
- II. Ministering Under the Dragon's Breath
 - A. Understanding and Ministering to Problem People
 - B. Understanding and Ministering in the Single-Staff Church
 - C. The Most Predictable Times of Conflict

III. Personality and Management Styles

- A. DISC
- B. Conflict Management Style Survey
- C. Personality Styles in Conflict Management

IV. Principles and Strategies for Resolving Conflict

- A. Difference between Problems and Conflict
- B. Personality Types Evident during Conflict
- C. Strategies for Managing Potential Conflict
- D. Strategies for Managing Public Conflict
- E. Principles of Mediation and Peacemaking

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