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IMPROVING MENTORSHIP AND LEADER DEVELOPMENT IN THE US ARMY

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The topic of Mentorship in the US Army is a critical component of the greater function of developing leadership. While mentorship finds its origins in classic Greece, its utility in shaping Army leadership is ever present. Past confusion and misinterpretations of mentorship allowed for a less than honorable stigma association with this function, preventing it from widest application across the Army. Many senior Army leaders have stated Army mentorship needs improvement. As the US Army returns from ten years of conflict the time for revitalizing leader development presents itself anew. This research paper seeks to define mentorship and identify the functions it serves as a component of leader development in the Army. This work also provides a blueprint for action as the Army seeks to improve mentorship across the force. Purposeful recommendations arise through a dyadic method that present a comprehensive organizational approach to improving mentorship and leader development across the force.
Leader Development receives an exorbitant amount of discussion and attention from US Army Senior Leaders. It is often the topic during keynote speeches, round table discussions as well as less-formal gatherings of Officer and Enlisted personnel. The timbre of these discussions often rotates around the belief that the Army as an Institution does not do enough Leader Development as is desired by its senior leaders. Given the operations tempo of Army forces following ten years of high deployment rotations this is easily recognized.

The need to improve how the Army grooms and grows leaders is readily apparent. One senior Army leader stated the quality of leadership—as reflected in the mentoring process—has fallen off, and that the Army is "just not taking the time" that is needed to spend with Army youngsters and their personal growth and development. The Army needs to do more of this. As a Professional organization, the US Army strives to ensure the senior leadership consists of the brightest and the best that lead its formations in what is often coined as a volatile, uncertain and complex environment. To this end, in a time where combat operations in Iraq no longer require historical rotational forces there is a renewed vigor to catch up on those years when leader development played second fiddle to the generation and deployment of combat forces.

As a learning institution, this is the prime time to reflect and refocus on leader development. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff specifies that the Army must pause and "see itself" to determine how it should adapt and institutionalize lessons of the last decade at War. Equally important in this effort is for the Army to identify what is absent, and to bring to light those changes that are necessary to propagate the
profession of arms. This facilitates the Army’s ability to promote the knowledge, skills, attributes, and behavior that develops future leaders.³

Much emphasis is placed on the Mentorship, Coaching and teaching of junior leaders in an effort to prepare them for increased responsibility. Senior leaders often comment on the importance of mentorship, and often denote that it is not done to the frequency and standards desired. While the importance of Mentorship is readily apparent to senior leaders, its importance to the Army as an overall institution is less apparent. The ability to mentor effectively is dependent on the skills of a senior to coach, teach and communicate. The US Army presently does not place enough emphasis on providing enough training in these domains for junior leaders. In this case, it is no wonder that as some leaders progress to higher levels, they demonstrate less-than-desired mentoring and coaching skills. This paper seeks to explore the importance of mentoring as a component of leader development, and provide a comprehensive organizational approach to improve the grooming of its future leaders in an effort to make the organization better than today.

A Look at the Historical Roots of Mentorship

Mentoring and developing junior members of society is certainly not a new concept. The Oxford Dictionary defines "Mentor" as "an experienced and trusted adviser."⁴ When considering its origin, Mentor is the name of the seasoned Greek advisor to young Telemachus - the son of Odysseus, penned by the classic storyteller Homer. In this classic example, a senior and experienced mentor provided sage advice to a younger and inexperienced protégé - Telemachus. This early example of mentorship establishes a classic definition of mentor-protégé relations.
There is an easily recognized need for mentoring. It allows a senior to pass along lessons and experiences, knowledge and wisdom, and history and tradition, often referred to as tacit knowledge.⁵ Within certain organizations and professions, mentoring facilitates the inculcation of values, practices and rituals promoting the retention of enduring themes deemed essential and unique. This practice embraces a higher level of importance in closed or semi-closed professional systems; in these systems, recruitment of middle and senior leadership come from inside the ranks instead of from open society. The US Army is such an organization.

The utility of understanding history is invaluable in the art of Statecraft. Further, as an Instrument of Power, military force possesses the singular might to take many lives. Over the course of history, there exist numerous failures in the application of military force and mistakes made at varying levels of military leadership. Through mentorship, the passing of knowledge of these lessons learned, the sharing of experiences, and the shaping of junior leaders in the present can prevent the repeat of mistakes. Additionally, mentorship can assist in sharing successful lessons and experiences with protégés, and foster an increased awareness and stimulate thought. This enables the success of junior leaders in their future experiences. Simply put, mentoring can shape young leaders to make better decisions tomorrow. To that end, it is important to grasp the essential ingredients of a true mentor-protégé relationship. What does this relationship look like, feel like and demonstrate?

Field Manual 6-22 addresses Army Leadership. This important doctrine outlines the core leader competencies expected of Army Leaders. The task of developing leaders reveals a critical sub-task as the counseling, coaching and mentoring of
subordinates. This publication defines Mentorship as "the voluntary developmental relationship that exists between a person of greater experience and a person of lesser experience that is characterized by mutual trust and respect (AR 600-100)." The critical components to this definition are trust and respect. Given this definition, how might the mentor-protégé relationship occur?

Reviewing some of the more evident cases of successful mentor-protégé relationships offers clues to the establishment of a solid relationship. In the case of General George C. Marshall, he was a protégé of General John J. Pershing. General Dwight Eisenhower received mentorship from General George Marshall. All three served as US Army Chief of Staff in their careers. On the civilian side of service, Brent Scowcroft, former US Air Force General and National Security Advisor to Senior President Bush mentored Condoleezza Rice, National Security Advisor to junior President George Bush. Lee Iacocca, former President of Chrysler Corporation received mentorship from Robert McNamara, former Security of Defense. Finally, Dave Thomas, founder of Wendy's Restaurant was a protégé of Harlan Sanders, the famous originator of Kentucky Fried Chicken. Most every profession has examples indicative of a mentor-protégé relationship. In each case an environment existed which allowed two individuals to meet, become acquainted, adequate time allowed to develop mutual trust and respect, and a desire to sustain the relationship into the future when separated geographically.

In the cases of the military Generals, the officers served in some capacity together early in their careers, which allowed for one - the senior, to observe the junior officer. During this exposure, the senior became a coach and trainer to the junior, and a
mutual trust and respect developed. In the instance of General Marshall, he served with General Pershing, as his aide during World War I. General Pershing was able to observe a young Marshall, and identify promising potential. A mentor-protégé relationship developed, and over the next thirty years, their relationship would continue to grow in which Pershing provided advice to Marshall on both professional and personal matters until his death. In the case of General Eisenhower, he served with General Marshall as a trainee at Fort Leavenworth. Marshall observed Eisenhower and was able to get a grasp for his potential. Their time together also allowed Eisenhower to established a respect for Marshall as his trainer. Their mentor-protégé relationship continued through Operation Overlord in World War II and beyond.

Modern Models of the Mentorship Process

As indicated above, a Mentor-protégé relationship is a long-lasting and enduring relationship that can last many years and decades. It does not simply blossom overnight. Kathy E. Kram, author of Mentoring at Work: Developmental Relationships in Organizational Life assigns a temporal aspect to Mentorship. Kram’s model divides Mentorship into four phases. They include initiation, cultivation, separation and redefinition phases. The initiation phase averages six months to a year with the identification of the mentee or protégé as one who’s potential is worthy of developing. It is arguable that this phase would indeed last this long in today’s Army due to the extended exposure of the mentor-protégé candidates to one another given proximity and time together on a twelve-month deployment. The high-stress and life-threatening situations revolving around combat reveal an individual’s potential rather quickly. This phase allows enough time for both individuals to reinforce the idea of the potential for a mentor-protégé relationship.
Kram's cultivation phase lasts from two to five years. Some of the functions delineated in this phase by Kram are not possible in an Army mentor-protégé relationship. These include assigning challenging work, extended coaching, visibility and protection and sponsorship. Due to the current permanent change of station process, these functions are difficult to sustain over two to five years, but may occur in a more compressed time while both officers remain with the same organization. Other functions that can occur during this phase include role-modeling, acceptance, confirmation of the relationship, counseling and friendship. Ultimately, this phase ends, however, once established the relationship can continue during the separation phase. According to Kram, this occurs when organizational requirements or individual needs call for a separation of the mentor and protégé.

The separation phase can last from six months to two years, following a significant change in the structural role relationship or the emotional experience of the relationship. In today's Army, this phase begins with the permanent change of station of the mentor or protégé and an adjustment period ensues. Both members must reassess and redefine the mentor-protégé relationship under changed terms, as it may no longer operate in the previous manner. Today, many characteristics of the relationship may sustain themselves due to the advent of modern communication capabilities to include email, cell phones, smart phones, Facebook and webcams to name a few. In many instances the relationship becomes easier due to the participants no longer sharing the same chain of command.

Finally, the relationship enters the final phase of mentorship - the redefinition phase. Kram states that during this phase the relationship may end or evolve into a
"more peer-like" friendship. This is due to the significant changes in characteristics of the relationship as some functions stop, decrease or increase. In the Army, some functions commonly survive to include communication, occasional counseling and friendship. Protégés might find promotion to the same or higher rank than their mentor in some instances. Kram specifically asserts that this phase of mentorship applies easily to members of senior Army leadership.

Kram's temporal depiction of the phases of mentorship neatly conforms to Army leader development today. With the exception of the cultivation phase, the timing serves as an acceptable model. During these phases, Kram describes four mentorship characteristics that are ongoing to varying degrees of occurrence. The first characteristic is that Individuals (mentees or protégés) are allowed to "address concerns about self, career, and family to providing opportunities to gain knowledge, skills and competence (from their mentors) and to address personal and professional dilemmas (with their mentors)." Next, both participants benefit since the relationships "respond to current needs and concerns of the two people involved." Third, the relationships "occur in an organizational context that greatly influences when and how they unfold." Finally, these relationships "are not readily available to most people in organizations." This final characteristic has limited application to the US Army.

As mentioned previously, mentoring is a leader development responsibility of all officers in the Army. It is available to all members of the organization as directed by Army Doctrine. A more accurate assertion may be is that some individuals do not choose to participate in a mentor-protégé relationship. Previous researchers expose that there rarely exists data to indicate any lack of protégés. Additionally, mentors of
various capabilities exist in abundance. The truth may be that simply put, mentorship is not a "spectator sport."\textsuperscript{16} It involves being proactive. It involves work and commitment on the part of both participants. One cannot sit idly on one's hands and by virtue of breathing receive or conduct mentorship. Some choose not to participate, as the human interaction elements of mentoring require effort and thought.

From a differing vantage, in his July 1986 Military Review article, Major General Kenneth A. Jolemore described the following ten functions of mentorship.\textsuperscript{17} These serve to resonate brighter with the military mentor-protégé relationship. These functions occur throughout the span of mentorship:

- Teaching - skills for job performance and future growth
- Guiding - unwritten rules, interface with important people, organizational and social behavior
- Advising - experience of a mentor 8 to 15 years older; wisdom
- Sponsoring - opportunities for mentee (protégés) growth
- Role model behavior - common values worthy of emulation
- Validating - goal setting
- Counseling - emotional support
- Motivating - encouragement to move on and accomplish goals
- Protecting - providing an environment allowing risk taking; buffer
- Communicating - candid, frank interchange of ideas

As related by Kram and Jolemore, there are many functions and characteristics associated with the concept of mentorship. Regardless of which model one prefers, the scope and depth of mentorship reveals it a complex activity. Furthermore, opinions and
definitions of mentorship vary - depending on the audience, which lends to misunderstanding and misinterpretation. Combined with the OPTEMPO of sustaining armed conflict over the last decade, the US Army appears to have lost a grip on this subject. Hence, the repetitive mention of the lack of mentorship and leader development by Army senior leaders.

Other Service Perspectives on Mentorship

Should the Army strive to regain control of its mentorship program? The Army may wrestle more so with this topic than its sister services. The US Navy does not maintain a formal mentorship program. Nearly 700 active and retired admirals provided firm resistance to the establishment of a formal mentor program. The Admirals related that mentorship relationships were more of a spontaneous event that developed quickly, and members should be extra vigilant regarding whom they select as protégés.

Division exists on the mentor issue in The US Marine Corps. Some officers indicate that mentorship is a science that requires formalization. Other officers subscribe to the converse - they believe it impossible to formalize the Art of mentorship. While both groups indicate there are benefits to the concept, there is a unique difference in their accepted definition of mentorship. Specifically, Marines believe mentorship is also a lateral activity, and no solely vertical. This expands the definition of mentorship to include peer-to-peer relationships and not strictly senior to junior.

None withstanding the positions of the other services, how might the Army regain control of this important topic? The Army and the US Marine Corps are the most "human-focused" of the services. Human development receives significantly more attention in these than the remaining services.

A Comprehensive Approach to Improving Leader Development

A comprehensive and organizational system approach best addresses a winning solution. A specific campaign designed to target the Officer corps, the Institute (TRADOC), the Personnel Management System (Army G1) while leveraging technology can make a change to current practice.

The Officer Corps as a whole needs to understand, embrace and accept the importance of leader development and mentorship in its profession. In its closed system, it promotes leadership from within and amongst existing ranks. Senior members developing junior members enhance the characteristics and values embedded in the profession. Senior leaders need to promote an environment of returning to their grass roots in demonstrating care and interest in junior officers. The days of zero defects shifted the Army paradigm to a Force concerned more with results than one truly interested and committed to investing in its human capital. An observation by General (Ret) Eric K. Shinseki summed this up right at the onset of the Global War on Terror. He stated that the Army "needs to adjust our culture, get back to our roots in training, improve officer leader development and management, and establish healthy feedback to inform the force and make adjustments where necessary." Now is the time to make those improvements to leader development.
A Call to Action for Senior Leaders

Army senior leaders must stress that leader development and mentorship is not synonymous with taking care of their favorites. Senior leaders must communicate to their subordinates that mentorship is a sub-task of leader development and not apprenticeship. Mentorship is inclusive, not exclusive. Today's personnel management system is not that of yesterday's, where an officer might remain for up to six years at the same duty station, where a senior leader could sponsor or protect the junior for an extended period. In the past, mentorship as a term attracted a negative connotation amongst some because of its misunderstanding. Instead of being seen as a practice to further the development on a professional and personal level, it was seen to promote and protect a select few and favorites. It became akin to "brownnosing, playing politics and schmoozing." This exacerbated perceptions of confusion and cynicism concerning the topic of mentorship.

Senior leaders can easily steer this to a positive connotation by taking the time to reinforce with their subordinates that the Army rewards its Officers based on their performance and merit. These efforts can readily curtail negative perceptions of mentorship and derail its ability to demonstrate an undermining of the chain of command and desired leadership environment. Finally, senior leaders must be more open regarding their relationships with their mentors. They know that they too have mentors, despite their higher place in the Army hierarchy. Having open discussion and dialogue with their junior leaders indicates that mentorship and leader development is ok, relevant, and a time-honored tradition. This is particularly important in a service which is populated with mostly Type A aggressive and confident personalities. The mere admittance of a role model articulating that he/she receives coaching and
guidance after 25 or 30 years of service is a strong message that will strike deep into an
inspiring young officer who desires to be like that leader.

A Call of Understanding for Junior Officers

The junior Officer Corps of today's all-volunteer force is smarter and brighter than ever. Unless they served prior enlistment time, all Captains and below, as well as many Majors volunteered to serve their Nation in harm's way during combat. The Army must recognize their volunteering to make a difference. These officers desire to be successful and need to understand mentorship and leader development from a senior member can assist them in this endeavor. Accordingly, a survey presented to nearly 14,000 officers, NCOs and civilians concluded, "Officers believe mentoring is important for both personal and professional development," yet a majority of officers report not having mentors.26 This study also revealed when asked, they report they are not being mentored or do not have a mentor.

Junior officers must understand it is acceptable to seek guidance, counsel and feedback. These aspiring young officers also need to realize that some years ago, one of their seniors walked in their footsteps. As noted by G. Joseph Kosper, young officers "are often overly confident and do not realize their weaknesses."27 These junior officers must understand that their participation in a mentor-protégé relationship is an asset and not a liability. Sage advice, candid and honest feedback are tools that when observed properly will assist them in seeing themselves to better achieve their potential and goals.

To this end, they need to understand that having multiple mentors is not only acceptable but also encouraged. Junior and mid-Grade officers indicate they generally think the mentoring concept is positive. The better they develop as leaders, the better
the Army institution will become. They need to recognize that they truly are the key to tomorrow in this regard. As intelligent as these young officers are, they must also recognize mentorship is neither apprenticeship nor favoritism. They are not being singled out for special treatment. They must also realize they might not always agree with the feedback they receive, and must take a proper reflection of themselves through this process.

Some would argue that providing junior officers coaching, teaching and other leader development training early - i.e. during the Basic and Career Courses is too early. Naysayers express that these officers should focus solely on developing tactical and technical skills. They believe an officer cannot be a mentor until they have reached the full Colonel level. The Army must challenge this theory of past perspective. The Future of the Army Profession cites that one of the hardest things for successful professions to do is question the assumptions on which their success is founded. To this end, now is the right time to review these assumptions.²⁸

Providing junior officers leadership development training earlier in the careers facilitates the development of compounded growth in the Army organization. As stated by John Kotter, successful organizations of tomorrow must be committed to lifelong learning today. As mentioned previously, junior officers are bright, intelligent and resourceful. An investing in their professional leader development earlier results in a greater potential long-term growth.²⁹ This facet of organizational change is extremely promising and powerful, and the Army should strive to capitalize on it. The Army prides itself on leading change. Therefore, it should not miss this opportunity. The Army can only benefit from this initiative in the future.
Shaping the Institution’s Role in Leader Development

Concerning the Army Institution, the Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) must make a significant change to progress mentorship and leader development. Regardless of which model observed; whether the Army adopts a formal mentorship program or not - a few points are certain. Coaching, teaching and mentorship are all leader development processes. TRADOC must take the lead on providing the basic skills instruction to the Officer Corps to better prepare them to participate in a mentor-mentee or protégé relationship. In the article, "Defining Mentorship" James O. Patterson asserts, "not everyone can become a mentor or mentee." Prudent thought dictates they must have an opportunity to succeed before deeming them a failure as a mentor or mentee. The Officer Basic and Captain Career Courses can provide the framework for this instruction. Specific instruction regarding coaching and teaching techniques can provide a foundation to Army junior officers for consideration. Patterson also highlights that mentoring "receives minimal exposure in the structured classroom instruction in the Army's formal educations system." It would almost indicate that the Army simply expected leaders to develop these skills magically over time. This method will not progress the Army leader development program.

With basic coaching and teaching instruction provided from TRADOC, junior officers have a basic toolbox of skills to take to operation units. The field assignments afford them an opportunity to further develop and hone these skills to progress towards better leadership. It is widely understood that experiential learning provides the best of learning environments. Mentoring, counseling and other human interaction skills are best learned and retained outside of the classroom. In a perfect scenario, they receive
further guidance in this area so that in the non-distant future they may assume
responsibilities as a mentor themselves.

Another area TRADOC can provide assistance is communications skills training.
As many senior leaders have said, Army human capital is its greatest resource. The
Army’s ability to communicate is critical, and the human dimension is where the value of
leader development is strongest. Kram denotes that a mentor also performs
psychosocial functions for the protégé. These include role modeling, acceptance and
confirmation; counseling and friendship. To realize these functions two individuals
must be able to communicate effectively. A basic instruction regarding communicative
skills and techniques during the previously mentioned courses lends to a facilitation of
these psychosocial functions.

On the mentor side of the relationship, TRADOC and the Combined Arms Center
(CAC) should seek to provide coaching, teaching and counseling skill refinement for
Majors and above. Programs of Instruction (POI) at Intermediate Level Education (ILE)
and Pre-Command Courses should stress these skills in the Seminar and adult learning
environments with a view to maturing officers as potential mentors. Presently, the ILE
POI briefly touches these subjects but not in any real depth. As field grade officers,
Army Majors enter a prime window to which Lieutenants and Captains view them as
role models. The Army must posture them properly to assume potential roles as
mentors. As supervisors of Battalion level staffs, Majors provide critical coaching and
teaching functions to junior officers. They are in a key position to reinforce the solid
values of the Army institution and in many instances make a difference in retention of
junior leaders. The Army can afford to heed research conducted by civilian consultants
that indicates if managers were better mentors, their profitability and retention of precious human capital would improve dramatically.\textsuperscript{33} 

The US Army War College should adjust its standing core curriculum and Program of Instruction (POI) to further this effort of change. The War College system seeks to educate and prepare students for future service as Strategic Leaders within their respective Defense communities. Leader graduates go on to serve as senior leaders who will serve as mentors. Army Field Manual 6-22 states a fundamental goal of strategic leaders is to leave the Army better than they found it.\textsuperscript{34} In this spirit, the War College should provide as a part of its POI an appropriate level of leaders development refinement instruction focused at the students' future level of service. The Army organization benefits immensely when senior officers receive instruction and discuss management of mentor programs, techniques and lessons learned. Additionally, the International Fellows in attendance from other countries may glean insight and contribute to the learning process. They may exchange their techniques and take with them tools to improve their respective nations' service. In an adult learning environment, students can discuss and share techniques that served them well or vice versa in their previous assignments. Of key importance is the concept of how they witnessed an effective change in leader development in their previous organizations. In The Future of the Army as a Profession, change (development) occurs when the leaders' existing frames are modified so that they consider new information or reorganize existing information and come to understanding the world in fundamentally different ways than they did using less advanced frames of reference.\textsuperscript{35} Mentors can assist protégés in this
regard by inciting them to consider advanced frames of reference through one-on-one dialogue.

The US Army G1 presently hosts the Army mentorship website. Individuals are able to visit the site, register as a mentor or mentee, and post biographical and demographical information. Following this process, Officers may browse the database and seek either a mentor or a mentee match. While this is an admirable effort, the G1 should do more. In the absence of face-to-face discussion - considered the best form of leader development, the G1 website can bring a potential mentor or mentee a step closer through leveraging new technologies. For example, a registered member with an option to display their official photo in their profile is an incentive. A visual reference easily informs the first impression made by a mentor or mentee candidate. This also supports the role-model aspect by review of the mentees maintenance of appearance and uniform. Finally, it also allows a prospective mentor to provide near-immediate feedback to a mentee regarding military appearance.

Other initiatives the Army G1 should pursue are information technology (IT) solutions that allow for one-to-one chat and webcam capability for mentors and mentees. While there are additional costs associated with these initiatives, the Army senior leadership has placed leader development as a high priority - why not demonstrate that importance through the leverage of new technologies? The G1 community must think outside the box and creatively construct an online vehicle that attracts mentors and mentees alike to participate in this program. What if a member user panel that not only lists the names of available mentors, but also displays a biography, demographics as well as the mentor's official photo and those of that
particular mentor’s protégés existed? This technique can easily serve to cultivate respect, a sense of pride and increased participation in the program.

Conclusion

In closing, the topic of Mentorship in the US Army is a critical component of the greater function of developing leadership. While mentorship finds its origins in classic Greece, its utility in shaping Army leadership is ever present today. Past confusion and misinterpretations of mentorship allowed for a less than honorable stigma association with this function, preventing it from widest application across the Army. Many senior Army leaders have stated Army mentorship needs improvement. However, the requirement to generate, train and deploy rotational combat forces to protect US national interests required leader development to defer its primacy to the operational missions at hand.

As the US Army returns from ten years of conflict in Afghanistan and Iraq, the time for revitalizing and refocusing leader development presents itself anew. This research paper seeks to define mentorship and identify the functions it serves as a component of leader development in the Army. This work detailed the origins and definition of mentorship. It presented some of the most successful examples of mentorship as a component of future leader development. Additionally, those functions deemed as valuable to the Army as an organization were exposed lending practical application to its value.

A comprehensive organizational approach offers the best solution to implement a plan to improve the mentor function of leader development across the force. The specific actions listed; through dyadic method for the Officer Corps, the Institution (TRADOC) and the Personnel Directorate (Army G1) provide a way ahead for success.
Finally, references to modern organizational change theorists clearly outline the need and importance of taking action today to inculcate and cultivate the Army leaders of tomorrow. Implemented now, these adjustments will best posture the Army for continued success and allow it to reap the best dividend for the most worthy of investments - its human capital.

Endnotes


3 Ibid.

4 Oxford University Press, 2012


11 Ibid, 56-57.

12 Ibid, 49.

13 Ibid, 2.

16 Ibid, 39.
18 Hunsinger, "Mentorship," 81.
19 Ibid, 82.
24 Ibid, 41.
27 Kopser, "Mentoring," 41.
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