

[00:02:02] **Guess:** So, I grew up in Louisville, Kentucky is where I'm from. I actually just moved here from Louisville, Kentucky. And so I was a product of an interracial marriage in which my mom was Hawaiian and my father was an African-American. We grew up in inner city. I was a smart kid that grew up in the hood, which brought some challenges. And so, it was it was very difficult to be one an interracial kid growing up that way and then to be a smart kid growing up there. I say I brought to the sushi restaurants to Louisville is that I had to take a sushi roll and put it in my Superman lunchbox and negotiate that, you know, for the lunchroom pizza. So, I think that's where my GE career started as well as to be able to do that. And so, I went through that process of having to be competitive, having to be smart, having to be extra in order to survive in a situation like that. My parents did an awesome job as I grew up in the house my father grew up in a house that his father acquired in early nineteen hundreds. And we didn't necessarily had to live there, but we wanted to be there. And so it was an old definition and I love my dad and my mom for it, is if you look at the definition in African-American community of making it, in most cases is leaving the neighborhood in which you were brought up in. And so, when you think in terms of all the success that that happened within that neighborhood, if we all stay well with a neighborhood, be like today. So as we look at transformation in the inner city, I think we as African-Americans have a responsibility to look at that a little differently.

[00:03:28] **Guess:** But I look at my siblings and we're all very successful because my parents only taught us that success wasn't only an option, it was an expectation. And so, in going through that system, I did what I did. I played sports. We all play sports, taught me a lot of things. I wasn't it wasn't passionate about sports. I was a different kid. I wanted to understand what is STEM today, what wasn't STEM when I was growing up, the engineering elements, the computer games. And so, I had the opportunity to go to the University of Louisville Speed Scientific School. It was a challenge for me because I thought I could go take a calculus test at eight o'clock in the morning and hang out with my buddies and party at ten and eleven o'clock at night. And so, I wasn't successful in school. I completed my pre-engineering. And it wasn't that it was challenging to me from an academic perspective, but it was a challenging for me from a personal perspective. So, I got married very early and married when I was 21, decided to join the military because I needed a different way. I needed a different path. And so, I wanted to go into what was arguably the most challenging field at the time, and that was a nuclear power program. So, I signed up for the U.S. Navy, graduated fifth in my class because, you know, quite frankly, I needed a discipline. I needed somebody sitting next to me with a machine gun saying, hey, you know, you need to.

[00:04:47] **Guess:** But I got that discipline and I got that know how. And I think the military could be away for a lot of kids, in my case, in inner city. It just needs some discipline and needs a different way. And so, I took that path and I excelled in it. So that was a path that led me to understand what teamwork was. You know, I was a very decorated soldier and quite frankly, it taught me a lot and it much gave me the opportunity to look at life differently, taking me out of the neighborhood I grew up in, giving me perspective, giving me a different way of life. Giving me a paycheck. Setting up a young family. Taking care of a family. The military gave me that. So, I spent almost nine years in the military and I decided to get out. I was in nuclear power. I was on submarines. I spent 300 days a year for six years on submarines with a young child, that went the formula for success. And so, I decided to take a different path and to get out. And I think one thing that convinced me was that later in my career in playing basketball, I had, you know, knee surgeries, bad knees and my last knee surgery in the military. And I actually died on an operating table. So, I says, well, you know, I didn't see the light. I felt a little warm and said, well, maybe I shouldn't make a different decision as far as my path is concerned. So, I decided at that point to get out of military. Then I returned back home to Louisville.

[00:06:05] **Nichols:** So then what did you do? What was next?

[00:06:08] **Guess:** When I got to the military I wanted to go back to what it is that I love. That was computers. And I got an opportunity to join a company called CBM, which was a local hardware/software company within the region, Kentucky mainly. That company was acquired by a company called Ameridata, which was home office here in St. Louis. So I got an opportunity to come to St. Louis and the home office often, and that was in 1994 when I joined, I got our military and I joined I got an opportunity to join the GE family, came to GE through an acquisition. So GE Capital, ITS, now, the company CompuCom acquired Ameridata. So, in 1994, I was a break fix technician working on printers. And again, I was electrician in a military nuclear electrician. So being able to fix things, work on things was in my DNA. What I was developing over time was leadership. I was a leader in the military. I love people, but I like to tinker with things, too. And so in 1994, a break fix technician and in 2005 I was the senior vice president in GE and I don't tell you that to impress you, only to tell you that GE is a company who's been very good to me and is good to most to join it. And it's given me the opportunity to be the best version of myself and to grow within that system. So and the opportunity to serve under four chairman starting with Jack Welch.

[00:07:30] **Nichols:** There were seven in total, right?

[00:07:32] **Guess:** And I served under four, which I guess would classify me as a seasoned leader. What they called us old people, Lisa. But it was fun. It was a learning environment. It was a family environment. It was culture. And we led in that. And that was that was one of the positives. You know, when you when you talked about being a GE, people knew what that was.

[00:07:53] **Nichols:** Absolutely. It's kind of iconic. When you think of GE, you just think of the management principles and the leadership and the innovation that comes out of GE. And you said that you served under four, you said Jack Welch was the first one.

[00:08:07] **Guess:** Yes, he was.

[00:08:08] **Nichols:** And I know you and I have talked about this, but topgrading was Jack's idea, right? And everybody that's a business knows about topgrading.

[00:08:16] **Guess:** We spent a lot of time on people and as you look at the organization, and of course, it did change over time. You look at that top portion of your organization, you know that top 20, that middle 70, at bottom 10, it was as a leadership team, how are you developing an organization? And, you know, over time I came to realize that, you know, really it wasn't God's plan for everyone to retire from the General Electric. And that when you pull people through a system and you're trying to protect people through a system really where they don't fit, it really isn't good for them. And of course, you know, GE., among other companies, have changed or their mindset as it relates to the topgrading. But we spent an inordinate amount of time looking at our people, giving them realistic expectations around their careers, paying attention to their desires and being able to align, you know, our leadership, you know, and our guidance to those people, lining them up with the things that their strengths would align to. And I remember the days we would sit in a room and we would have a card for every employee. And there's 500 employees in the organization. And you would spend two days talking about 500 people in having debates around, you know, who are who is your top talent, who's trending towards top, who's challenged, you know, and who's trending towards the bottom. And my pet peeve as a leader was that anyone I talked about in that bottom 10 percent should know that they're there in that we as leaders are helping them in talking to them and communicating to them around their performance and what our expectations are and a gap between performance and expectations.

[00:09:49] **Guess:** So, there was a challenging time. It challenged us as leaders, you know, sometimes didn't feel good as a leader to be in that spot. But as you mature and as you grow

and you start to look at I remember times when I had to do layoffs and no one likes to do that. But when you have an employee stand up and give you embrace you and give you a hug and say thank you because of stress they were under and because they needed that transition, but they were they were afraid to make that transition themselves. And as you know, we have a lot of examples of that, too. So, life is 5 percent what happens to you and ninety five percent of what you do about it. So, we live in the 95 and so it's been great. And so, you go from Jack and you go to Jeff.

[00:10:31] **Nichols:** And Jeff had a little bit different mindset, right? Jeff was I.T. friendly.

[00:10:36] **Guess:** Jeff was IT friendly meaning that he made that transition to digital, you know, created digital as a whole. We went from probably an analytical company doing Six Sigma. I was a master black belt myself. To more FastWorks and Agile and getting into that minimum viable product and having a different mindset. And it was a positive thing from a driving decisions, but maybe a little negative in that, you know, when you go from waterfall methodologies of programming with a lot of touch points with your customers on requirements upfront to Agile and FastWorks, which when we made that transition, it was probably less about although meant to be interactive with your customer. It was we're still going to build it faster, but maybe not build it what you want. And so, we had some self-correcting to do there and, but again, I think Jack and what he did around digital and what we were trying to do to sort of own that IOT space was transformational as well.

[00:11:39] **Nichols:** So, tell me what GE looks like today. And I should have looked at this, but I know at one time there's GE Health Care, I mean, there's all sorts of divisions that made up the greater GE.

[00:11:50] **Guess:** I would say there's a couple of things that happened transitionally for us. So, when we had the issues with the banks, the government stepped in and they declared because we were basically trading as a bank because of the GE Capitals position within us is that we were deemed too large to fail. Now, as a chief technology officer at GE, that was huge for us. I mean, it would cost us millions, if not billions of dollars to be regulated as a bank. And so, it was our goal to get out of that designation. And the only way to get out of that designation as a sell down GE Capital and of course, the PE around a bank and an industrial company is different. And so when you think in terms of what was going on with GE, so you're selling down sort of your banking, you short cycle businesses, GE Appliances was on the block, another short cycle business we were transitioning from short cycle to long cycle on the industrial side. And what that

unearths and what you get to see in that or are things that are systemic to long cycle businesses, you know, and that is inventory turns and accounts payable and receivables and all of those things that are systemic problems, those start to come into play because you can't really count on the short cycle businesses to, I wouldn't say hide, but it does mask your financials in a way. And so, you saw that transition that is happening. So, I think there's a there was a point to where we were good at what we did. We had great leaders. You had some turnover in leadership. You had some flux there. I mean, we fell in love with our story a little bit and we fell in love with PowerPoint. I remember an opportunity that I got eat dinner with Jeff Immelt. And he said Chet, give me two things I should concentrate on as a leader. And I said, Jeff, really get us back to leadership. We manage a lot of things. We manage P&Ls, we manage financials, we manage businesses. We've got to get back to our core and that is leadership. And we had a long conversation about that. And then I said, also, get rid of PowerPoint in this company. And I said, I spend most of my time creating PowerPoints, listening to PowerPoints, helping someone to create PowerPoint. It's all about PowerPoint.

[00:13:53] **Guess:** And then, of course, when you arrive at a level in the company, you get some to do your PowerPoints and they get the automations and I go and you know, and then we would argue around fonts and other things, right? And so, we got to a point where GE had his own font. It's called GE Inspira. So, yeah, we have our own font.

[00:14:11] **Nichols:** So what he say when you said get rid of the PowerPoint?

[00:14:13] **Guess:** Well he said to me, and this was a job changing scenario, he said Chet I get it, he says, you know, we're changing the way we look at sessions. So we look at our sessions; session planning for us is your financial sessions, your people's sessions, we have several sessions. He says I'm streamlining those processes and we're simplifying the companies as such that we're not always living in sessions. And I said yeah Jeff, I saw the corporate simplification pitch. And he said, Chet, what did you think? I said, it's a simplification pitch; It's 43 pages.

[00:14:43] **Nichols:** Not that simple.

[00:14:44] **Guess:** And so he said, got it; which is a codeword for enough of that. And so I'm like alright, it's been nice working here, but it was, and we really had to take a step back. And I think given some of the financial challenges that we're having, the fact that we're transforming a company short cycle to long cycle, Jeff decided that it was his time to do something different,

along with the board, and then that's when we had Mr. Flannery come in. And so, John was probably hit unfairly with a lot of a lot of issues that he had to clean up. And so, we didn't get much time with John. He did his best to clean up what it is he could clean up. But it was that notion of, GE has always been known for its ingrown talent, right? You hire somebody the process putting of another CEO in always kind of came from the inside. And I think, you know, with the pressure on the board, the transition of the company, it was; Let's look outside. And so, Larry, I think is absolutely right, leader. I think he is going to transform the company the way it needs to be transformed. But it's a long road to do and some tough decisions to make. But I think he's the right person to do it.

[00:15:55] **Nichols:** Good. We're going to take a quick break and we'll be right back with Chet guess.

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[00:16:35] **Nichols:** Chet, I want you to tell our listeners a little bit about Crotonville. And I remember reading about this and I think Carlinville was your leadership institute that was founded in 1956. I think the nexus around that was innovation, ideas, learning and I know GE was a learning organization. And then somehow, I want to hear about Aunt Barbara.

[00:16:59] **Guess:** Yes, I definitely will do that. So Crotonville for anyone in GE is the place you want to go every year. It's that one place; and what Crotonville is, is it's GE's training facility. And it's all self-contained. It's all GE. It's a hotel, it's eating facilities, the bar, all of the conference centers, everything's GE. So, the only reason to be there is if you're GE or you're having a meeting with GE. And so, we had just a huge catalog of training opportunities there. And quite frankly, as you cut your teeth as a leader, there is a path and a track of leadership courses that you should take and they were all aligned to Crotonville. And then, of course, there were the higher level courses that were aligned to sessions that were held at Crotonville. So you would get an opportunity to present to the executive council, GE and to the chairman and CEO and to the leadership team and had an opportunity to interact with them. And so, it was very prestigious to be a part of that and to be immersed in that whole opportunity. It also was one of

those deals where you would spend more time on your first trip with your boss talking about what to do and not to do in that bar that was at Crotonville.

[00:18:14] **Guess:** You had to remember that, you know, there was more careers lost in that place than made. So that was always fun. You don't want to be the first one there. You want to be the last one to leave or do you do not want to spend much time there? But you know, everything about GE and his leadership team was it was about learning opportunities. Talk about this to Aunt Barbara for a minute. She was a special aunt that was my spiritual guide as I was coming up, young 21 year old that sat at her table and she said, Chet, you know, God has some very special things planned for you as it relates to people. She said you have wanted two choices. You can either accept it and suffer less or not and suffer greatly. And so, she has been a factor in my life and a connection to God that I didn't understand as a young man. But over time, as we prayed together and she's prayed on my life for as long as I've been on this earth. You know, I got to start to see what those prayers were about. And so, I sat in her chair as I was at Crotonville one of our large leadership, one of our senior leadership courses and a three-week course. And you get a free weekend. And my Aunt Barbara lived 30 mins from Crotonville. So, I said, you know, it's just been a while since I've seen her or I sat down in that same chair, she says. So how is this people thing coming? She says, I haven't heard from you in a while, so I expect you haven't accepted it yet. And so the backdrop of that timeframe was when we were going through some major layoffs. I was being promoted to a new executive of the company. I was going to have people impacted, with layoffs, and I wasn't there to help and protect. So, I was struggling and so as I sat and I talked to her, she said to me, and this is you know, you heard me say this earlier in the conversation. It's not God's plan to have everyone retire from GE you need to let these layoffs go. But to give you a sense of her spirituality. Those layoffs weren't public, nor had I had a conversation with her. So, you would think over time that I would eventually listen to her. But, you know, some of us are slow. She did have a direct line.

[00:20:15] **Guess:** And so when I got back to Crotonville and mind you, all GE, no one on site except for GE, on my pillow was the prayer of Jabez. And I open that book and it says go as far as wide as your heart desires always with God by your side. Love, Aunt Barbara. I to this day don't know how she got that book there. I never asked her. And quite frankly.

[00:20:39] **Nichols:** She was very resourceful, Aunt Barbara.

[00:20:42] **Guess:** She was. And, of course, it took me four years to read that book. But she was special. She still is. We still talk. She asked me not too long. She said, are you still saying a

prayer, Jabez? I said every morning, my family and I, we pray in a circle and we say that prayer every day. And she said, Chet, you had turn that thing off, you know, because God will continue to increase your territories.

[00:21:04] **Nichols:** And so are you ready? Well, we you know, I've heard that story, but I guess the first time that I heard the story, I didn't hear this part where she said, how is that people thing going because I haven't heard from you so I guess you're not listening. Because you'd not reached out to her. So she's going, you don't get the people thing quite yet cause you haven't reached out to your Aunt Barbara. That's funny.

[00:21:27] **Guess:** Well, it goes to faith and where I am today and I used sort of a submarine analogy here. Faith is not needing a windshield to see where you're going. Or a rearview mirror to see where you've been it's just to understand that God has ordered your steps. And I needed to see, you know, and as I look back on it, we all are very good in hindsight looking at how God played a part in your life. It's now understanding as talking to my wife had a big meeting a few months ago. And she says, Chet, I hope this goes well. And I say, well, you know, the difference between Chet of yesterday instead of Chet of today with Kingdom Capital is today will go as God plans and it's being able to submit to his will. And that's where she was trying to get me the whole time. Of course, I want to lead this. I want to make this happen. My implementation of faith was God put me in the game. Seemed like much like the coach guide my thoughts, my action and my words. But I'm in the game and now it is really trying to understand how to be submissive to his will to figure out what you need to do in it.

[00:22:26] **Nichols:** Sure. Well, to me, this is the perfect segue way because I wanted to talk to you. What moved you from the old Lou to the new Lou? So, you moved from Louisville to St. Louis and we're so glad that you're here. So, let's talk about that transition. What brought you here?

[00:22:43] **Guess:** The CTO and overall the infrastructure and infrastructure products for the company we were in 176 countries. And so, my was home office out of Cincinnati. My family lived in Louisville. So, yeah, an apartment in Cincinnati. I had a six-month old at the time and I lived in a different city. I was raising my kids, you know, via FaceTime and now the Facebook portals. And we all sit and eat dinner together, but we do it electronically. And what God was doing for me and to me at the time, you know, Dave Steward was a big factor in my life, was a mentor and a coach and was always there.

[00:23:21] **Nichols:** You had met him because GE used World Wide, right?

[00:23:24] **Guess:** I met him and so he was always there. And he always knew when to reach out, knew when I was struggling. Again, transition, although not a transition from Aunt Barbara to Dave Steward and even Brandon Mann who, also, who I'd met through that whole process is to be able to sit still for minute as I ask God for discernment. The problem is I couldn't hear him because of a noise that was around him; around me. And so, what he did was he paused me, put me in that apartment by myself. He gave me a book to read. He gave me several books to read. He gave me a church that I could go to at six o'clock in the morning before work. He introduced me to a homeless community and he was transforming me to prepare me to work for faith based organization. So, it was several things. It was around how I was changing, how the company was changing, how I was raising my family from a distance. Now I have a saint for a wife and I love Lindsay to death. And Lindsay was ex-GE and she understood and she understood what I needed to do and the sacrifices I needed to make and never questioned it and never pushed back. But coming home every Thursday night or Friday, and seeing your kids for a couple of three days, it was difficult. And I think the one moment that sticks out in my mind was when my middle child, Madeleine, says, Dad, can we go to your house this weekend? We were in Louisville at the time. And I said, Madeleine, you're in my house. And she goes, oh you don't live here, I'm talking about the one in Cincinnati. And I was like, wow, my kids, they don't feel me. And so, we were going through some major restructuring and reorganizations in the company. You know, I looked my wife in the eye and says, look, I can't do this anymore. Spiritually, I'm changing. There's something bigger there for me. I want to go serve not that GE is not a great company. It was. It still is. It just it didn't fit where I was. And so, you know, I had an opportunity. You know, with a great boss and CIO, Chris Drumgoole, to have a real heart to heart with him that says, look, I really want to do something different. He made it and structure it in a way that that I could retire. So I actually retired on May 31st and I started with Kingdom Capital June 1st. Some people take some time off.

[00:25:42] **Nichols:** Long retirement there.

[00:25:45] **Guess:** And it's so powerful in that, you know, people asked me what I do at Kingdom Capital. I really explain it in two ways. First off, every Monday our team gets together and we talk about what we were blessed with over the week and the weekend. And well, we need prayers for, and we all know each other's families and we know each other's experiences. And we live in that moment of being involved in each other's lives,

[00:26:11] **Nichols:** Doing life together, that's what I call it.

[00:26:12] **Guess:** Yes. And we pray together. You pray in every meeting that we do. That was part of my spiritual journey in where I was going. And secondarily as a leadership team, we gets together and we study scripture and its applicability to what it is we do in the workplace. And so, we strongly believe in that, values drive valuation.

[00:26:35] **Nichols:** I love that. Values drive valuation.

[00:26:38] **Guess:** Right. And so, we are trying to apply values first and foremost, look in a mirror and apply them to ourselves. And then as we look at investment, there has to be values in alignment.

[00:26:47] **Nichols:** Right. Let's back up for a minute, because our listeners that are listening may go, oh, I don't even know what Kingdom Capital does. Why don't you talk a little bit about Kingdom Capital?

[00:26:57] **Guess:** Absolutely so Kingdom Capital is a private investment firm that's values-based. So, our goal really is to have institutional investors in us that we invest in others values-based. And then eventually have a foundation that lies as connected to us in order to take those that virtuous cycle of capital and be able to invest it back into 501c and the community and people. And so, you won't hear this often, would you? We are a private investment firm formed for the purposes of giving money away, which you're never going to hear that. We're looking at kingdom size as we would call a kingdom size bets and opportunities. So, we have a relationship with Washington University, working with the university on capitalization of research and being able to look at cancer in how to apply technology to advance that and utilize technology in a whole health and medical sector. So, we focus on that. I came alongside to create a technology investment group. There is two terms we use. Everybody knows what IRR is, in that return. We look at ERR which is eternal rate of return, which really for us means how do you run your company? How do you employees feel? What are your values? What do you value system? What is your culture? Is it sustainable? How do we come along side to enhance and help? But it's also about the things that you work on. Are we going to make a difference? And that was initially difficult for me because when you think about technology; technology by itself is meaningless. Technology as it's applied to something is when it becomes valuable. For instance, as we look at PercayAI, a company that we just formed with Wash U out of that research and it's going to take drug discovery from 15-20 years into the 2-3 year timeframe. So,

you know, that whole speed of market to heal the body. In other companies that we're looking to form. But then investments that we look to make in companies that will a) have sort of the right leadership and the right culture, but b) how those things enhance our BD activities and also enhance people's lives. So, that's the things that we're focused on.

[00:29:06] **Nichols:** There's so much there that we don't have time to go into everything. I do want to talk about something extra. So, what do you believe is it something extra that every leader needs?

[00:29:18] **Guess:** Well, so I had to factor in the shield values, as we call them, Kingdom Capital. And those are the values that we look for to biblically based for us, although you don't have to necessarily have Christian beliefs, but have values, similar values. And that is service, humility, integrity, excellence, love and diversity. We call them our shield values. The one I have focused on the most over my life is really about humility.

So when you ask about every leader and what they need, you know, you go back to the base where to lead and really what that means is to have charge of something or to guide on a way, especially by going in advance. And so as a young leader, you say, well, you know, I can lead by example. And of course, you have a little bit of arrogance and confidence around; now, I'm a leader and I'm special. So you want people to understand that. Obey me respectfully. But I think as you grow over time, you start to understand it is not about you. It's not about you as an individual. It's less about you and it's more about the people. You know, as you approach that humbly and you look at humility. It's about transformation of leading with your ears versus leading with your mouth. It's about understanding your organization. And the people around you. It's about propping people up. It's about getting the best version of them, which in essence gets the best version of yourself. And it's about best for and best from which is what we're about. You know, one of the things we do in our leadership meetings at Kingdom Capital is that we had this little argument between us is that; who was the dumbest in the room?

[00:30:49] **Nichols:** Who is the dumbest in the room?

[00:30:51] **Guess:** And we compete on it, right? Because now it's a it's the thing.

[00:30:55] **Nichols:** Have you got the trophy yet?

[00:30:57] **Guess:** And Brandon Mann says, it's gotta be me, it's gotta be me. But what that means is we yield to each other and we respect each other and we respect each other's

opinions. And to me, humility is just something that you will get over time as, what I call, a seasoned leader. And the earlier you understand that, the further, I think you will go. It's hiring people better than you. It's understanding that you want to transform those folks to be better than you. I always say to the guys that I recognize early on their careers; look, I was good to you when I met you so when you become my boss, I expect the same. Be gentle. And so that for me, humility is the big key for me.

[00:31:41] **Nichols:** Couldn't agree more. Well, is there anything coming up, Chet, that you want to tell the listeners about? Or is there anything like that that you want to tell the listeners about or they want to just reach out to you, you know, to ask you questions about things?

[00:31:55] **Guess:** Well, I certainly can contact us through kingdomcapital.com. And quite frankly, we are a fairly new firm, two years on health and medical side since June on the technology side. We're trying to connect to the Cortex and St. Louis in general and quite frankly, we'll look inside before we go outside. So, we're really scouring St. Louis to figure out what those investments would be and how we connect those investments. And then having a founder in Kingdom Capital and World Wide Technology be the same, it's really how to bridge that gap and prop up a startup community in a different way. Part of my role as CTO is to build that bridge between what is Kingdom Capital and what is World Wide Technology without any appearance of conflict of interests or any of those things. And I think we have that figured out. And so we just take to great, you know, organizations and figure out how to make them better and then how to take a startup community, starting with St. Louis in some cases and help to prop them up. So more to come on that. I'm looking very forward again, been in St. Louis since July, I moved here with my family, excited about the people and opportunities, excited to meet people like you. Lisa, to be a part of this and I look forward to learning this city and its great people and figuring out how to make a difference and serve.

[00:33:11] **Nichols:** Well, we are so glad you're here. I think St. Louis just hit the jackpot. Seriously, Chet, with having you in your family here. So, thank you again for being on the podcast.

[00:33:21] **Guess:** Thank you.

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