

SPECIAL ADVERTISING SECTION

American Funeral Director

INNOVATORS

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The Faces of Funeral Service



The Face of Technology

Effie Anolik
Co-founder & CEO

Afterword

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Effie Anolik is the co-founder and CEO of Afterword, a technology company helping funeral homes support today's families - whether they plan in-person, online, or somewhere in between. Effie's interest in funeral service began in 2018, when she planned her dad's funeral and found it challenging to navigate the process online. Drawing from her background at Shopify, she set out to build the planning experience she wished she had - one that empowers families and equips funeral professionals with modern tools.

Under Effie's leadership, the Afterword team moved into a funeral home, observed real services, and built alongside Directors to understand their needs. Today, Afterword is used by some of the most forward-thinking firms in North America. The company is leading the charge in applying AI to automate tasks, reduce errors, and give Directors more time to focus on what matters most: serving families.

Effie has been featured in Fortune, TechCrunch, and Bloomberg, and has spoken at NFDA, WilbertEDU, and the FTC as the only vendor representative.

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The Face of Funeral Service Marketing

Michael Anderson
President

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Michael Anderson grew up immersed in the funeral profession, cutting his teeth in the family business, Anderson Funeral Homes in Cincinnati, Ohio. As the son of a second-generation funeral home owner, he gained a deep appreciation for the industry early on. After completing his MBA at the University of Michigan, Michael spent more than a decade building his expertise in pharmaceutical marketing. In 2017, he returned to his roots with a new mission: to elevate the marketing standards of funeral service providers. That mission sparked the creation of what is now @need Marketing.

“Marketing in the funeral profession is a special kind of challenge, but one that we thoroughly enjoy tackling together.”

Today, @need Marketing partners with more than 100 funeral homes and cemeteries nationwide. From doubling website traffic with tailored SEO campaigns to driving lead generation through strategic pay-per-click and building strong brands with bold creative, @need delivers results built specifically for the funeral profession.

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The Face of Credit Card Processing

Jim Luff

*Funeral Associations
Relationship Manager*

Aurora Payments

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<https://go.risewithaurora.com/en-us/subscribers-afd>

Aurora Payments is the most prominent and trusted credit card processor in the death-care industry and serves as an endorsed credit card processor for numerous state funeral associations.

Aurora Payments supports industry associations with revenue share programs, financial contributions, and sponsorship.

Jim spent 25 years as a transportation contractor working alongside funeral homes in California. Jim is considered an expert in merchant services for the industry and works to blend the newest payment collection solutions for funeral homes and death-care providers.

You'll find Aurora Payments and Jim at the 2025 NFDA Convention and many other state association conventions. Stop by and learn how you can eliminate credit card processing fees and keep more profit by switching to Aurora Payments. Visit www.risewithaurora.com, send email to jim.luff@risewithaurora.com or call 833-287-6722.

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The Face of Funeral Home Lending

Teresa Carlson *Vice President,
Small Business Lending Business
Development Officer*

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Funeral professionals spend time educating clients, helping them make deeply personal decisions – and the same is true for Teresa Carlson, an expert lender in the industry. As a financial professional with over 25 years of small business experience, including more than a decade in the funeral sector, Teresa understands she needs to talk more than numbers with borrowers. She focuses on getting insights into their business and life goals and working with them on a customized plan to grow their legacy.

With The Bancorp Commercial Lending team, Teresa has helped fund over \$200 million in Funeral Conventional Loans since its inception three years ago. The loans provide capital to independent funeral businesses to purchase real estate for multiple locations and finance goodwill, partner buyouts, expansion loans, and more. The Bancorp also offers SBA 7(a) loans that help funeral home owners to refinance debt, buy equipment, and plan for succession.

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The Face of Funeral Funding

Jennifer Hill

Vice President, Post-Funding Operations

C&J Financial, LLC

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Jennifer Hill serves as Vice President of Post Funding Operations at C&J Financial, a leader in the funeral funding industry. She began her journey with the company in 2008, bringing dedication and heart to every role she's held. Starting in production, Jennifer quickly demonstrated leadership and a deep understanding of C&J's mission, rising to a director position by 2010.

Jennifer is committed to operational excellence while cultivating a culture of compassion and support – values that define both her leadership style and the company.

"I have loved every moment at C&J, even the struggles," she reflects. "They always made us better."

Jennifer believes the reason C&J can serve grieving families with such genuine care lies in how the company treats people – with empathy, respect, and the warmth of family. That same spirit of compassion radiates through every interaction, whether with a customer navigating a difficult loss or a colleague working through a challenge.

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The Face of Funeral Funding

Jennifer Oliver

*Vice President, Pre-Funding
Operations*

C&J Financial, LLC

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www.cjf.com

Over the past 15 years at C&J Financial, Jennifer Oliver has had the privilege of supporting clients with consistent care and a sincere commitment to their assignment needs.

Jennifer believes the true success behind C&J lies in the exceptional team she's fortunate to be a part of. Behind every successful case is a group of hardworking individuals who share a common goal: to serve funeral professionals with unmatched speed, empathy, and reliability. It's this collective effort that fuels C&J's reputation and Jennifer's pride in the work they do. Together, they make a difference – not just in business, but in the lives of those they serve.



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The Face of Talent Acquisition

Barcley Cadet

Talent Acquisition Manager

Carriage

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Barcley Cadet is rethinking how recruitment should feel in the deathcare profession. As Talent Acquisition Manager at Carriage, he's not just filling roles – he's crafting an experience. Barcley brings a fresh energy to hiring, blending smart tech tools with a human touch.

His approach makes the process more flexible, personal, and meaningful for every candidate. From that first message to day one on the job, Barcley is focused on making people feel seen, heard, and excited to join. He understands that the right first impression sets the tone for long-term success, and he's building a system that reflects just that. By leveraging digital platforms without losing the human connection, Barcley is helping reshape what recruitment looks like in death care – thoughtful, engaging, and forward-thinking.

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The Face of Education

Shannon Register

Distance Education Coordinator

Commonwealth Institute of Funeral Service

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Shannon Register joined Commonwealth Institute in 2023. She has experience in both funeral service and real estate. As the college's DE Coordinator, she runs the online programs – quite a feat in today's world and the growing trend of online classes. Shannon also teaches, and in that capacity, she delves into the modern trends of funeral service – including cremation, hospitality, and alternative forms of disposition. Her classes include CANA's crematory operator certification and NOR certification, at no additional cost to the student.

Shannon is expanding the college's use of social media and technology – especially AI. She has begun a campaign of AI usage on the part of our faculty to help create new and ever-changing exam items. This keeps exams fresh while deterring academic dishonesty. Additionally, Shannon runs the college's career center which assists our students and alumni find a job within the profession.



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The Face of Banking

Stephanie Castagnier Dunn
EVP, Chief SBA Revenue Officer

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Stephanie Castagnier Dunn is a seasoned national small business lender dedicated to serving business owners for over 20 years. Dunn has worked in the top ranks of the nation's leading SBA banks and has had the honor of helping build various national funeral lending platforms. She has helped countless business owners acquire firms, expand facilities, restructure debt, finance family succession, partnership buyouts, and more.

As EVP Chief SBA Revenue Officer of Community Bank & Trust/Phoenix Business, Dunn continues her dedication to providing thoughtful finance solutions to funeral home owners across the country.

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The Face of Cremation Recycling

Kevin McKay

Director of Cremation Division

Cremation Recycling

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Kevin McKay has been in the precious metal recycling field since 2001, with a primary focus on dental, dental laboratories and over the last nine years, crematories. He has lectured dozens of times at various dental and crematory study groups, panels and conferences. He has also been published numerous times in dental and death care publications.

He joined Cremation Recycling (a division of Mid-States Recycling) in 2016 but has worked with the ownership and upper management of MSR for over 15 years as a former client. This gives him the unique perspective of having transactional experience from both sides. He shifted his focus exclusively to the crematory profession because of his desire to bring much needed transparency to an under-informed sector.

Kevin resides in Naperville, Illinois, since 2007 and has two young daughters.

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The Face of Digital Tribute Creation

Nick Kelly
Co-Founder

Eulogize

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<https://www.eulogizememorials.com/>

Organizing music festivals in Australia isn't the usual path into funeral tech, but for Eulogize Memorials Co-Founder Nick Kelly, it all comes down to storytelling.

Eulogize's smart tech streamlines the creation of personalized funeral stationery and tribute videos, transforming hours of work into minutes, but what it's really doing is harnessing the power of storytelling to honor someone's life.

Eulogize was built with empathy at the center, a platform to support grieving families and enable funeral professionals. It simplifies creating bespoke, meaningful tributes, helping businesses grow pre- & post-service revenue. Designed for today's changing funeral landscape, Eulogize also enables a self-service option for families.

"Even businesses solely providing disposal can now offer tributes and benefit from that revenue."

Nick now splits his time between Sydney and the U.S., working with funeral directors to design human-centered solutions that make hard moments a little easier.

Reach out to talk about personalization, AI, or even golf.

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The Face of Succession Planning

Chris Cruger

Chief Executive Officer

The Foresight Companies

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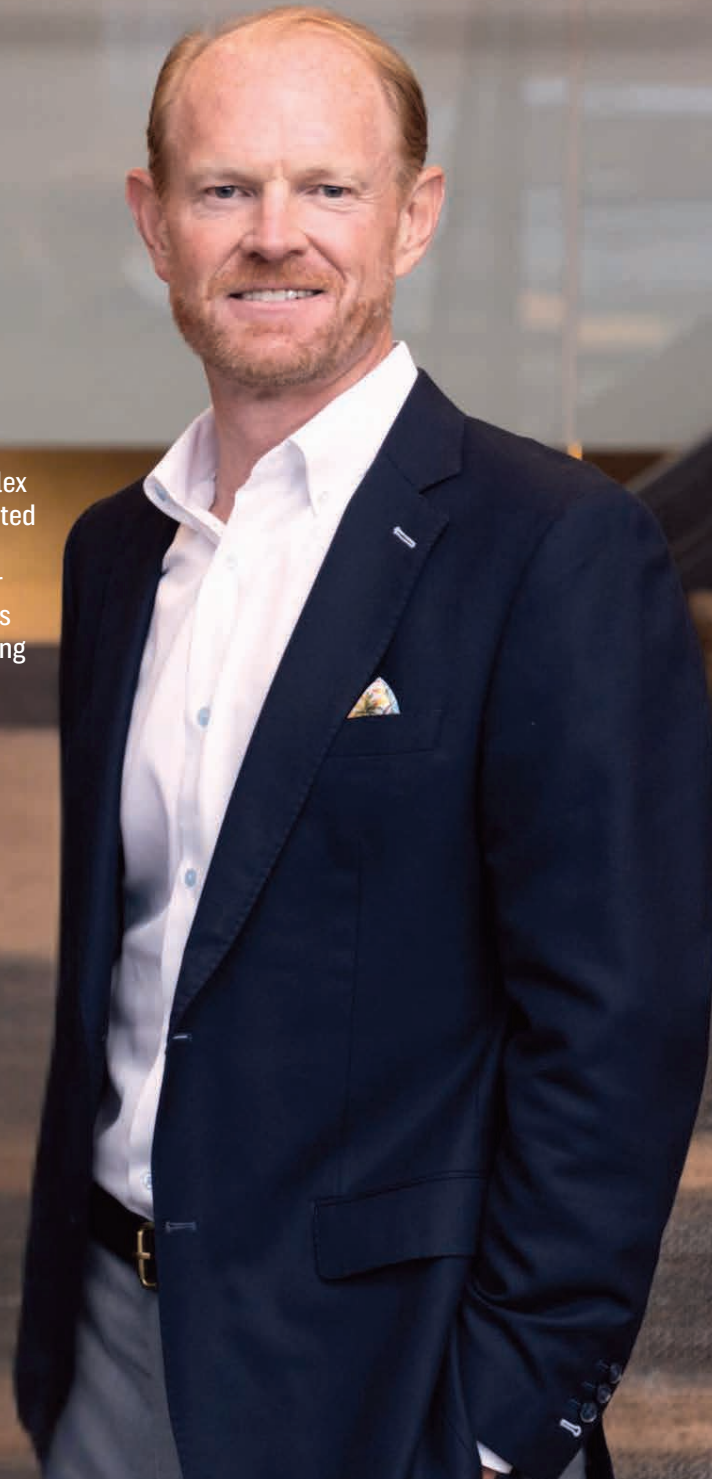
www.theforesightcompanies.com

Chris Cruger is dedicated to transforming complex family and business dynamics into expertly crafted succession plans. Chris and the Foresight team ensures that clients are thoroughly prepared for their succession by understanding their business goals, needs, and preferred timelines. Recognizing the uniqueness of each situation, they prioritize getting to know the individuals behind the businesses they serve.

“As many owners near retirement age, we emphasize the importance of readiness,” notes Cruger. “Taking the time to plan opens up numerous options and leads to better outcomes for everyone involved.”

The funeral and cemetery profession is undergoing a profound evolution shaped by shifting societal attitudes, technological advancements, and changing consumer preferences. This is causing many owners to transition out of the business.

While planning is always wise, it becomes especially crucial as this transition approaches. Cruger elaborates, “Succession planning is the blueprint for continuity, ensuring that the vision, values, and legacy of the business continue beyond the owner’s tenure.”



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The Face of Customer Experience

George Owens
President

Fortitude Research and Marketing
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www.fortitudeinsights.com

A 20+ year veteran of the profession, George Owens and his Fortitude Research and Marketing team (formerly SoCal Approach) launched Fortitude CXP 5 years ago to create a simple-to-use program that gives death-care professionals a comprehensive understanding about the families they serve and how to better meet their needs.

“Our team has a passion for funeral service and understands the positive impact of customer-centric decision-making,” says Owens. “We know that Fortitude CXP improves operations, helps proactively address reputation management, and drives incremental revenue.”

With more than a decade in the profession preceded by more than a decade at J.D. Power, the world’s leading authority on customer satisfaction, George Owens believes he and his team bring a data-driven approach to solving problems. He and his team apply these insights every day to help organizations make better operational and marketing decisions.



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The Face of Memorialization

Karl Weisenbeck
President

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It's nice to be featured as an "innovator." But it's really not about me so let's put credit where credit is due ...

It's about our funeral home partners who tell us what personalization products would be valuable to them. We just hold up a mirror and ultimately develop the products that help them grow their business and comfort their families. They are the true innovators.

It's about the people at Funeral Home Gifts who work tirelessly to produce and ship those products for next day delivery to thousands of funeral homes throughout the country. They realize that funeral directors have one shot at creating a "wow" experience for grieving families ... one chance to get it right.

To our customers – THANK YOU!
We appreciate our partnership and don't take it for granted. We will continue to work to deserve it going forward.

To those funeral homes who have yet to try us – please reach out to us. Give us the opportunity to prove our value.



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The Face of Finance

Matt Manske
Founder

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<http://www.funeralhomeloan.com>

Transforming Funeral Home Financing
FuneralHomeLoan.com was created by a seasoned banker (Matt Manske) who saw too many funeral home deals fall apart due to poor loan structuring and lack of guidance. With 20+ years of experience and hundreds of successful closings, he offers direct support to buyers and sellers – bypassing online loan brokers and big banks.

Unlike traditional acquisitions, funeral homes rely heavily on goodwill, which many lenders cannot finance. That's where SBA 7(a) loans become essential – offering lower down payments and better terms. While local banks remain valuable for operating accounts, they rarely fund goodwill.

Big banks often pass borrowers between departments, creating delays and confusion. At FuneralHomeLoan.com, you work with one banker for the life of your loan. Deals succeed when they're structured for credit from day one – not just sales promises. The new site FuneralHomeLoan.com offers credit-level assessments and real-world advice for buyers and sellers seeking successful transitions.

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The Face of Preneed

Jack Hirsch
President

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Funeral Services, Inc. (FSI) and Argent Trust are pleased to welcome Jack Hirsch. In his new role as President of FSI, Jack is following recently retired and well-respected industry veteran Bill Williams, continuing a legacy of providing innovative technology and efficiency for our clients throughout the death-care profession.

With over 20 years of experience in trust services, regulatory reporting, and endowment management, Jack brings deep expertise in the death-care space.

Jack works alongside a multidisciplinary team of legal, investment, and administrative professionals – including accountants, attorneys, and developers – to deliver smart, tailored strategies that reduce trust management burdens and help funeral homes and cemeteries grow. Argent's independent and entrepreneurial legacy, combined with FSI's innovative technology, makes us a natural partner for progressive, growth-minded operators.

Visit us at an upcoming industry event to meet Jack and learn how Argent Trust and FSI can help you move forward with confidence.



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The Face of Transportation

David McComb
CEO

**Inman Shipping Worldwide/
Travel Plan by Inman**
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www.shipinman.com

David McComb provides Inman Shipping and the Travel Plan by Inman with experience acquired in the funeral profession since 1978.

"I am passionate about serving the death-care professional. I have purchased and created several businesses for just this purpose, creating solutions that allow funeral professionals to spend more time serving their families," McComb said. "The way to relieve a staffing crunch is to have Inman go to work for your shipping needs which will save your funeral director time to do their required activities."

Inman will save you money! Inman Shipping coordinates the transportation to bring a loved one home for a ceremony.

The Travel Plan by Inman gives peace of mind travel protection to purchasers and offers a generous commission to our marketers. We are the only travel plan supported by our own network of vetted service providers and backed by insurance.



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The Face of Technology

Mandy Benoualid
Co-Founder & President

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www.mykeeper.com

Mandy has dedicated her work to transforming how we remember and celebrate those we've lost. Inspired by her own family history and the realization that every name in a cemetery holds a lifetime of stories, Mandy created Keeper to help families and communities fill in "the dash" – the rich, meaningful life between birth and death.

Since 2013, Keeper has been shaping the future of remembrance – with technology that connects communities and reimagines how we experience cemeteries and funeral homes.

Under Mandy's leadership, Keeper has become more than an online memorial platform – it is a trusted solution for cemeterians and funeral professionals, supporting everything from preneed sales and marketing to cemetery kiosks and customer engagement.

Mandy notably partners with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to honor over 10 million American Veterans online and leads Keeper's innovative kiosk modernization project across all National Cemeteries.

She also serves as Editor of TalkDeath.com, advocating for death education and awareness.

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The Face of Funeral Vehicle Manufacturing

Mike Kellerman

Visionary / Product Development

Kellerman Professional Vehicles

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Amelia, Ohio 45102

www.kellermanprofessionalvehicles.com

From body shop to coachbuilder, Mike Kellerman has worked every job in the vehicle manufacturing business. Kellerman founded Eagle Coach in the 1980s after merging his manufacturing talents with his visionary ideas and quickly became an industry leader. Since selling Eagle Coach, Kellerman went on to become the product-development visionary for the five businesses currently under the Kellerman Professional Vehicle banner.

Researching industry trends and listening to your customers are paramount to Kellerman's success. He was the first to introduce fiberglass and lifetime no-rust guarantees, the first to provide an in-hearse urn carrier in response to the growing cremation trend, and the first to use an OEM reverse-hinge rear door to facilitate casket loading.

"Innovation is just a by-product of listening to your customers," said Kellerman. "Every new idea has come from studying what our customers do and how we can make things more efficient for them."

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The Face of Preneed

Jessi Booker

*Regional Vice President,
Sales*

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Insurance Company (NGL)**

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Family is everything – that's true for me,
the death care profession and NGL.

When I started with this company
18 years ago, I never imagined how the
relationships I've built would change
my life. So much so that my two
daughters now work at NGL in our
service area, helping funeral homes
and families navigate the world of
preneed insurance.

As regional vice president, I work with
some of the most dynamic, innovative
and compassionate funeral service
professionals in the country. There
are many parallels between the culture
at NGL and the culture at funeral homes:
integrity, dependability and a
commitment to excel at the big and
small things. There is nothing more
rewarding.

I've made my career in this profession,
and I'm proud to say my daughters are
following in my footsteps – guiding our
partners and funeral home professionals
so they can serve their communities
and help families.

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The Face of Prenneed

Al Whitmer

**AVP National Sales Distribution -
Prenneed**

Wellabe

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wellabe.com

Al Whitmer wrote his first Prenneed policy with Wellabe in 2006. Eleven years later, he joined Wellabe's team on the corporate carrier side. He credits Wellabe's Prenneed Funeral insurance for playing a role in his decision to enter the preneed space.

Al is proud of his contributions toward Wellabe's well-rounded product portfolio, saying, "It doesn't matter what you're looking for – we have something for you." He's excited to keep innovating to bring the best options and guarantees to our partners.

With Wellabe's plans, families benefit more, funeral homes receive better rates of return, and agents have a better experience. "There's nothing that's going to take better care of your families or your funeral homes in the long run," says Al.

Since 1929, Wellabe has provided solutions to help customers protect their health and financial well-being. We'll always be here helping people do more, worry less, and make every day better.

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